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GLASGOW:

WILLIAM COLLINS, INGRAM STREET;

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CONGREGATIONAL

SERMONS.

BY

THOMAS CHALMERS, D.D. & LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH,

AND CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF FRANCE

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SERMON I.

ON THE UNIVERSALITY OF SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.

"Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed. And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned."—ISAIAH xxix. 9—12.

WHAT is affirmed in these verses of a vision and prophecy, holds so strikingly true of God's general revelation to the world, that we deem the lesson contained in them to be not of partial, but permanent application—and we therefore proceed immediately, to the task of addressing this lesson, both to the learned and unlearned of the present day.

Let us, in the first place, dwell for a little on the complaints which are uttered by these two classes respecting the hidden and impenetrable character of the book of God's communication—and, in the second place, try to explain the nature

of that sleep which is upon both, and in virtue of which both are alike in a state of practical blindness to the realities of the divine word—and, in the third place, raise a short application upon the whole argument.

I. There is a complaint uttered in these verses, first by the learned—and, secondly, by the unlearned—and we shall consider each of them in order.

1st, If a book be closed down by a material seal, then, till that seal be broken, there lies a material obstacle even in the way of him who is able to read the contents of it. And we have no doubt, that the possession of the art of reading would form the most visible and prominent distinction, between the learned and the unlearned in the days of Isaiah. But it no longer, at least in our country, forms the distinction between these two classes. Many a man who can barely read in these days, will still say, and say with truth, that he is not learned. We must now therefore strike a higher mark of distinction—and, in reference to the Bible, such a mark can be specified. This book is often made the subject of a much higher exercise of scholarship than the mere reading of it. It may be read in its original languages. It may be the theme of many a laborious commentary. The light of contemporaneous history may be made to shine upon it, by the diligence of an exploring antiquarian. Those powers and habits of criticism, which are of so much avail towards the successful elucidation of the mind and meaning of other authors, may all be transferred to that volume of which God is the

author—and what, after all this, it may be asked, is the seal or the obstacle which stands in the way of learned men of our present generation? How is it that any of them can now join in the complaint of their predecessors, in the days of Isaiah—and say, I cannot read this book because it is sealed? Or, is there any remaining hindrance still, in virtue of which, the critics, and the grammarians, and the accomplished theologians of our age, are unable to reach the real and effective understanding of the words of this prophecy?

Yes, there is such an obstruction as you now inquire after; and it is wonderful to tell, how little the mere erudition of Scripture helps the real discernment of Scripture—how it may be said, of many of its most classical expounders, that though having eyes, they see not, and though having ears, they hear not—how doctrine, which if actually perceived and credited, would bring the realities of an eternal world to bear with effect upon their conduct, is, operatively speaking, just as weak as if they did not apprehend it even in its literal significancy—how the mere verbiage of the matter is all in which they appear to be conversant, without any actual hold of sight, or of conviction, on the substance of the matter—how dexterously they can play at logic with the terms of the communication, and how dimly and deficiently they apprehend the truths of it—how, after having exhausted the uttermost resources of scholarship on the attempt of forcing an entrance into the region of spiritual manifestation, they only find themselves labouring at a threshold of height and of difficulty, which they cannot scale

—how, as if struck with blindness, like the men of Sodom, they weary themselves in vain to find the door—and after having reared their stately argumentations about the message of peace, they have no peace; about the word of faith, they have no faith; about the doctrine of godliness, they have no godliness.

And it is not enough to say, that all this is not due to the want of discernment, but to the want of power—for the power lies in the truth—and the truth has only to be seen or believed, that it may have the power. The reflection may never have occurred to you—but it is not the less just on that account, how little of actual faith there is in the world. Many call it a mere want of impression. We call it a want of belief. Did we really believe, that there was a God in existence—did we really believe, that with the eye of a deeply interested judge, He was now scrutinizing all the propensities of our heart, and appreciating, with a view to future retribution, all the actions of our history—did we really believe, that sin was to Him that hateful enemy with which He could keep no terms, and to which He could give no quarter; and that with every individual who had fallen into it, either in its guilt it must be expiated, and in its presence be finally done away, or the burden of a righteous vengeance would rest upon his person through eternity—did we really believe, that in these circumstances of deepest urgency, a way of redemption has been devised, and that to all whom the tidings of it had reached the offer of deliverance, both from sin in its condemnation, and from sin in its

power, was made, through the atoning blood and sanctifying spirit of a complete and omnipotent Saviour —did we really believe, that such an offer was lying at the door of every individual, and that his reliance upon its honesty constituted his acceptance of the offer—did we really believe, that throughout the fugitive period of our abode in this world, which was so soon to pass away, God in Christ was beseeching every one of us to reconciliation; and even now, as if at the place of breaking forth, was ready to begin that great renewing process, whereby there is made a commencement of holiness upon earth, and a consummation both of holiness and happiness in heaven —were these, which we all know to be the truths of Christianity, actually believed, the power of them upon our hearts would come, and come immediately, in the train of the perception of them by our understandings. If we remain unquickened by the utterance of them, it is because, in the true sense of the term, we remain unconvinced by them. The utterance of them may be heard as a very pleasant song—and the representation of them be viewed as a very lovely picture—but the force of a felt and present reality is wanting to the whole demonstration. And all that reason can do is to adjust the steps of the demonstration—and all that eloquence can do, is to pour forth the utterance—and all that conception can do is to furnish its forms and its colouring to the picture. And after learning has thus lavished on the task the whole copiousness of its manifold ingredients, may we behold in the person of its proudest votary, that his Christianity to him is nothing better than an aerial phan-

tom—that it is of as little operation in disposting sense, and nature, and ungodliness from his heart, as if it were but a nonentity, or a name—that to his eye, a visionary dimness hangs over the whole subject matter of the testimony of the Bible—and still untranslated into the life, and the substance, and the reality of these things, he may join in the complaint of the text, as if they lay sealed in deepest obscurity from his contemplation.

Make what you like in the way of argument, of so many simple conceptions, if the conceptions themselves do not carry the impress of vividness and reality along with them—the reasoning, of which they form the materials, may be altogether faultless—and the doctrine in which it terminates, be held forth as altogether impregnable—yet will it share in all the obscurity which attaches to the primary elements of its formation—and while nature can manage the logical process which leads from the first simple ideas, to the ultimate and made-out conclusion, she cannot rid herself of the dimness in which, to her unrenewed eye, the former stand invested; and she must, therefore, leave the latter in equal dimness.

The learned just labour as helplessly under a want of an impression of the reality of this whole matter, as the unlearned—and if this be true of those among them, who, with learning and nothing more, have actually tried to decipher the meaning of God's communication—if this be true of many a priest and many a theologian, with whom Christianity is a science, and the study of the Bible is the labour and the business of their profession—

what can we expect of those among the learned, who, in the pursuits of a secular philosophy, never enter into contact with the Bible, either in its doctrine or in its language, except when it is obtruded on them? Little do they know of our men of general literature, who have not observed the utter listlessness, if not the strong and active contempt wherewith many of them hear the doctrine of the Book of God's counsel uttered in the phraseology of that Book—how, in truth, their secret impression of the whole matter is, that it is a piece of impenetrable mysticism—how in their eyes, there is a cast of obscurity over all the peculiarities of the Gospel—and if asked to give their attention thereto, they promptly repel the imposition under the feeling of a hopeless and insuperable darkness, which sits in obsolete characters over the entire face of the evangelical record. There may be bright and cheering examples to the contrary—of men in the highest of our literary walks, who, under a peculiar teaching, have learned what they never learned from all the lessons of the academy. But apart from this peculiar influence, be assured that learning is of little avail. The sacred page may wear as hieroglyphical an aspect to the lettered, as to the unlettered. It lies not with any of the powers or processes of ordinary education to dissipate that blindness, wherewith the god of this world hath blinded the mind of him who believes not. To make the wisdom of the New Testament his wisdom, and its spirit his spirit, and its language his best-loved and best-understood language, there must be a higher influence upon the mind, than

what lies in human art, or in human explanation. And till this is brought to pass, the doctrine of the atonement; and the doctrine of regeneration; and the doctrine of fellowship with the Father and the Son; and the doctrine of a believer's progressive holiness, under the moral and spiritual power of the truth as it is in Jesus, will, as to his own personal experience of its meaning, remain so many empty sounds, or so many deep and hidden mysteries—and just as effectually, as if the Book were held together by an iron clasp, which he has not strength to unclose, may he say of the same book lying open and legible before him, that he cannot read it, because it is sealed.

2. So much for the complaint of the learned; and as for the complaint of the unlearned, it happily, in the literal sense of it, is not applicable to the great majority of our immediate countrymen, even in the very humblest walks of society. They can read the book. They can put together its letters, and pronounce its words, and make a daily exercise, if they choose, of one or more of its chapters. They have learning enough to carry them thus far —but not so far as to keep them from joining the unlearned of my text, in the complaint that I am not learned. They cannot for example estimate the criticism of many an expounder. They have not time to traverse the weary extent of many a ponderous and elaborate commentary. And those who have had much of Christian intercourse with the poor, must have remarked the effect which their sense of this inferiority has upon many an imagination—how it is felt by not a few of them, that they

labour under a hopeless disadvantage, because they want the opportunities of a higher and a more artificial scholarship—and that if they could only get nearer to their teachers in respect of literary attainment, they would be nearer that wisdom which is unto salvation—and that though they can read the book in the plainest sense of the term, they cannot read it with any saving or salutary effect, just because, in the language of my text, they say, that they are not learned. And thus it is, that the man who has the literary accomplishments after which they sigh, meets with two distinct exhibitions to instruct and to humble him. The first is, when the poor look up to him as to one who, because he has the scholarship of Christianity, must have the saving knowledge of it also—when he intimately feels that the luminary of science may shine full upon him, while not one ray to cheer or to enlighten, may pass into his heart from the luminary of the Gospel. The second is, when he observes, among the poor, those who live, and who rejoice under the power of a revelation, to which himself is a stranger—those who can discern a beauty and an evidence in the doctrine of Christ, which have never beamed with full radiance upon his own understanding—those whose feelings and whose experience move in a consonancy with the truths of the New Testament, which, in his own experience, he never felt—those whose daily path bespeaks the guidance of a wisdom which never yet shone upon his own way, and who are blest with a peace and a joy in believing, which have never found entrance into his own desolate bosom.

This gives us a new sight of the peculiarity which lies in the Bible—and by which it stands distinguished from all other compositions. There may remain a seal upon its meaning to him, who in the ordinary sense of the term, is learned; while the seal may be removed, and the meaning lie open as the light of day to him, who in the same sense is unlearned. It may come with all the force of a felt and perceived reality upon the one, while the reality is not perceived, and therefore not felt by the other. To the man of literary accomplishment, the report of eternal things may reach no other influence than that of a sound upon his ear, or of a shadowy representation upon the eye of his fancy. To the unlettered workman, it may reach an influence as substantial and as practical, as the report of to-morrow's work, or to-morrow's wages. The latter may be led to shape his actual measures by the terms of the message of revelation. The former may lavish all the powers of science, and subtlety, and speculation upon the terms—and yet be as untouched in his personal habits by all the information which it lays before him, as if the message were untrue. It is not learning that has made the difference—for the veil may be upon the eyes of him who is rich in this acquirement, while it is taken away from him who, in respect of scholarship, is poor, and blind, and destitute. There is not a single weapon in the whole armoury of human learning, by which the proudest of its votaries can force his entrance into a region of spiritual manifestation. The wise and the prudent cannot, on the strength of any of their own peculiar re-

sources, they cannot, with all their putting forth of desire and energy, attain unto those things which are revealed unto babes. There is a barrier here against which all the machinery of the schools may be made to play without effect. And it would look as if argument might as soon remove the film from the eye of him who labours under a natural blindness, as dissipate that thick and impalpable obscurity which lies in the way of all spiritual discernment.

There are two immediate uses to which all this may be rendered subservient. The first, to rebuke the poor for an apology which they are sometimes heard to make, when convicted of blindness and ignorance in regard to the essential truths of Christianity. The second, while we do not sustain the apology, to encourage them with the assurance, that it is just as competent for them to be wise unto salvation, as for those in the higher and more cultivated walks of human society.

In pressing home the truths and overtures of Christianity on the poor, we often meet with the very answer of the text, "I am not learned." This answer is not copied by them from the text. But the text, true as the Bible strikingly and universally is, in all its descriptions of Nature, copied it from them. It is in truth a very frequent conception among them, that had they the advantages of a higher scholarship than what they actually possess, they would be nearer the wisdom which is unto salvation. This ministers a kind of false security to their hearts, under the consciousness of a lack of knowledge, and that too of vital necessity

to their immortal well-being. They think that there is an ignorance which necessity attaches to their condition—and that this should alleviate the burden of their condemnation, in that they know not God. They spend the day in drudgery—and think, that on this account, they must also spend it in a state of desolation, as to the whole light and learning of the Gospel. They are apt to look upon it, not as their fault, but as their doom, that they are strangers to the doctrine of peace and of righteousness—and often regard it to be as effectual a plea for justifying their ignorance of what is sacred, as of what is profane and secular, that they are not learned

Now we refuse this apology altogether—and we should like to warn you in time, that it will stand you in no stead, nor be of any avail to you in the day of reckoning. The word of the Lord is in your hands, and you can at least read it. The candle of the Lord may be lighted in your hearts, and you can at least pray for it. The Gospel is preached unto you as well as unto others—and you can, at least, attend to it. There will no incurable darkness settle upon your minds, unless you love the darkness. There will no fixed and obstinate unbelief adhere to your understandings, unless your deeds are evil. This will be your condemnation, if you are found to be without knowledge and without faith. But be assured, that all the aids and promises of Christianity are unto you as well as unto others; and if you grieve not the Spirit by your wilful resistance—if you put not at a distance from you that Holy Ghost which is given to those who obey him, by your disobedience—if you despise

not the grace of God by your daily and habitual neglect of those mercies, in the use of which alone, God undertakes to meet you with its influences—then be assured, that all the comforts of the Gospel, and all its high and heavenly anticipations, will descend more richly upon you, than upon the noble and wealthy of our land: and let your work through the week be what it may, there is not an hour of it which may not be sweetened by a blessing from above, which may not be regaled and heightened into rapture by the smile of a present Deity.

It is not merely to blame you, that we thus speak. It is further to encourage you—and that, by an assurance which we cast abroad among you, and with all the confidence of one who has the warrant of inspiration. The knowledge which is life everlasting, is just as accessible to the poor, as it is to the rich, who have time to prosecute, and money to purchase education. Whatever the barrier may be, which rises as a wall of separation between Nature and the Gospel, it is just as impenetrable to the learned as it is to the unlearned—and however the opening through that barrier is made, it is made as often, and oftener, for the purpose of sending a beam of spiritual light into the heart of the latter, than into the heart of the former. The Gospel may as effectually be preached unto the poor, as unto the wealthy. Simply grant to the one the capacity of reading, and the opportunity of hearing—and he is, at the very least, in as fair circumstances for becoming one of the children of light as the other. In respect of human science, there is a distinction between them. In respect

of the Gospel, that distinction is utterly levelled and done away. Whatever the incapacity of Nature be for the lessons and the light of revelation, it is not learning commonly so called, which resolves the incapacity; and until that peculiar instrument be actually put forth which can alone resolve it, the book of revelation may pass and repass among them—the one complaining, that he cannot read it, because he is not learned—the other equally complaining, that he cannot read it, because it is sealed.

II. Let us now proceed, in the second place, to explain a circumstance which stands associated in our text, with the incapacity both of learned and unlearned, to discover the meaning of God's communications—and that is the spirit of a deep sleep which had closed the eyes of the people, and buried in darkness and insensibility the prophets, and the rulers, and the seers, as well as the humblest and most ignorant of the land.

The connection between the one circumstance and the other is quite palpable. If a peasant and a philosopher, for example, were both literally asleep before me—and that so profoundly, as that no voice of mine could awaken them—then they are just in the same circumstances, with regard to any demonstration which I addressed to their understandings. The powers and acquirements of the latter would be of no avail to him in such a case. They are in a state of dormancy, and that is just as firm an obstacle in the way of my reasoning, or of my information, as if they were in a state of

non-existence. Neither would it at all help the conveyance of my meaning to their mind, that while dead to all perception of the argument which issued from my lips, or even of the sound which is its vehicle, the minds of both of them were most busily alive and active amongst the imagery of a dream—the one dreaming too, perhaps, in the style of some high intellectual pursuit—and the other dreaming in the style of some common and illiterate occupation. Such, indeed, may be the intoxication of their fancy, that in respect of mental delirium, they may be said to be drunken, but not with wine, and to stagger, but not with strong drink. Still, though in the language of the text, I should cry out, and cry, it may be just as difficult to awaken them to a sense of what I am saying, out of a reverie of imagination, as it is to awaken them out of a simple and unconscious slumber. Nay, the very engagement of their fancy with its everfloating and aerial pictures, may have the effect of more strongly detaining the mind from the call which I vainly lift, for the purpose of arousing them. And as the visionary scenes, whether of bliss, or of anxiety, or of sadness, or of eager pursuit, or of bright or of fearful anticipation, pass successively before them, the reality of my waking address may fall unheeded upon each—and though the one be learned, and the other be unlearned, it, in respect of their listening to me, and their understanding of me, totally annuls this difference between them, that their eyes are firmly closed, and a deep sleep is poured upon them both.

Such, it is possible to conceive, may be the

profoundness of this lethargy, as to be unmoved by the most loud and terrifying intimations. I may lift this note of alarm, that a fire has broken out in the premises, and is on the eve of bursting into their apartment—and yet such may be the death-like sleep of both, that both may lie motionless and unconscious on the very confines of their approaching dissolution. Or, what would be more affecting still—both, in the airy chase of their own imagination, may be fully engrossed among the pictures and the agitations of a dream, and be inwardly laughing, or crying, or striving, or pursuing, or rejoicing—and that, while the flame is at their door, which in a few minutes is to seize upon and to destroy them.

When a man is asleep and dreaming, he is alive only to his own fancies, and dead to all the realities of the visible world around him. Awaken him, and he becomes intelligent and alive to these realities—but there may still be other realities to which he is not yet awakened. There may remain a torpor upon his faculties, in virtue of which he may have as little sense and as little feeling of certain near and impending realities, as the man who is wrapt in the insensibility of his midnight repose, has of earth and of all its concerns. The report of an angry God, and a coming eternity may as little disturb him, as the report of a conflagration in the premises, disturbs the sleeping inmate before he is awakened. It is not learned argument which works out, in the one case, the escape of him who is in danger. Could we only awaken him, we would need no argument. Neither is it learned

argument which works out, in the other case, the escape of him who is in danger. It is the cry of "Awake, O sinner," lifted with power enough to arouse him out of his spiritual lethargies. It is the shaking of the soul out of those heavy slumbers, under which it is weighed down to deep and strong insensibility, about the awful urgencies of guilt, and danger, and death, by which it is encompassed. When the house which covers a sleeping peasant and a sleeping philosopher, is in flames, it is not by a demonstration of philosophy that the one is awakened, and the other is left to perish in the ruin —and when both are awakened by the same call, it is not at the bidding of philosophy that the one hastens his escape, while the other lingers in the midst of destruction. They need only to be recovered to the use of senses which were alike suspended with both, that both may flee with equal promptitude from the besetting calamity. And the same of the coming wrath—the same of the consuming fire, that is now ready to burst on the head of the guilty, from the storehouse of treasured vengeance—the same of all the surrounding realities of God, and judgment, and eternity, which lie on every side of us. It is not philosophy which awakes him who has it, to a sense of these things. Neither is it the want of philosophy which keeps him who has it not, fast asleep among the vanities and day-dreams of a passing world. All the powers of philosophy operating upon all the materials of philosophy, will never dissolve the infatuation of him who is not yet aroused either from the slumbers, or from the visions of carnality. To

effect this, there must be either the bestowment of a new sense, or the restoration of an old sense, which has been extinguished. And be he learned or be he unlearned, such an awakening as this will tell alike upon both. The simple view of certain simple realities, to which the vast majority of the world are asleep, will put each of them into motion. And when his eyes are once opened by the force of such a demonstration, will he either flee from the coming wrath, or flee for refuge to the hope set before him in the Gospel, without the bidding or the voice of philosophy to speed his way.

And that the vast majority of the world are, in truth, asleep to all those realities which constitute the great materials of religion, may be abundantly proved by experience; and we cannot proceed far in the details of such a proof, without leading many an individual hearer to carry the topic home to his own experience. For this purpose, let us just compare the kind of feeling and perception, which we have about an event that may happen on this side of death with the feeling and perception about an event, as nearly similar as possible, that will happen on the other side of death; and try how much it is that we are awake as to the former, and asleep as to the latter. Should we assuredly know, that in a few years we are to be translated into a splendid affluence, or sunk into the most abject and deplorable poverty, how keen would be our anticipation, whether of hope or of fear, and why? because we are awake unto these things. We do assuredly know, that in a few years we pass that mysterious portal, which leads to bliss, or pain, or annihilation

—and these are certainties which we do not keenly anticipate, and just because we are asleep unto these things. Should we behold a neighbour on the same path of enterprise with ourselves, suddenly arrested by the hand of bankruptcy, and be further told to our conviction, that the same fatality is sure to encounter all who are treading that path, we would retrace, or move aside, or do our uttermost to evade it—because all awake to the disgrace and wretchedness of bankruptcy. We every month behold such a neighbour arrested by the hand of death —nor can we escape the conviction, that sooner or later, he will cast his unfailing weapon at ourselves; and yet no one practical movement follows the conviction, because we are asleep to a sense of the mighty ruin which awaits us from unsparing and universal mortality. Should the house in which you live, be entered with violence by the executioners of a tyrant's will, and a brother, or a child, be hurried away to a perpetual dungeon—if made to know, that it was because such a doom had been laid upon the whole family, and that sooner or later, its infliction was most surely in reserve for every successive member of it—would not you be looking out in constant terror, and live in constant insecurity, and prove how feelingly you were awake to a sense of the sufferings of an earthly imprisonment? But though death break in upon our dwelling, and lay a ruthless grasp on the dearest of its inmates, and leave the assurance behind him, that he will not cease his inroads on this devoted household, till he has swept it utterly away—all we know of the loneliness of the church-yard, and all we read of the

unseen horrors of that eternity to which the impenitent and the unbeliever are carried by the ministers of the wrath of God, fail to disturb us out of the habit of living here, as if here we were to live for ever; and that, just because while awake to all the reality which lieth on this side of the grave, we are asleep to the consideration both of the grave itself, and of all the reality that lies beyond it.

Now, the question comes to be, how is this sleep dissipated? Not, we affirm, and all experience will go along with us, not by the power of natural argument—not by the demonstrations of human learning, for these are just as powerless with him who understands them, as with him who makes his want of learning the pretence for putting them away—not by putting the old materials of thought into a new arrangement—not by setting such things as the eye of Nature can see, or its ear can hear, or its heart can conceive into a new light—not by working in the varied processes of combination, and abstraction, and reasoning, with such simple and elementary ideas as the mind of man can apprehend. The feelings and the suggestions of all our old senses put together, will not make out for us a practical impression of the matters of faith; and there must be a transition as great as that by which man awakens out of the sleep of Nature, and so comes to see the realities of Nature which are around him—there must be a something equivalent to the communication of a new sense, ere a reality comes to be seen in those eternal things, where no reality was felt or seen, however much it may have been acknowledged before.

It is true, that along the course of our ordinary existence, we are awake to the concerns of our ordinary existence. But this is not a wakefulness which goes to disturb the profoundness of our insensibility, as to the concerns of a higher existence. We are in one sense awake; but in another most entirely, and, to all human appearance, most hopelessly and irrecoverably asleep. We are just in the same condition with a man who is dreaming, and so moves for the time in a pictured world of his own. He is not steeped in a more death-like indifference to the actual and the peopled world around him, than the man who is busy for the short and fleeting pilgrimage of his days upon earth, among its treacherous delusions, is shut in all his sensibilities, and all his thoughts, against the certainties of an immortal state. And the transition is not greater from the sleeping fancies of the night, to the waking certainties of our daily business, than is the transition from the day-dreams of a passing world, to those substantial considerations, which wield a presiding authority over the conduct of him who walketh not by the sight of that which is around him, but by the faith of the unseen things that are above him, and before him. To be thus translated in the habit of our mind, is beyond the power of the most busy and intense of its natural exercises. It needs the power of a new and simple manifestation; and as surely as the dreamer on his bed behoves to be awakened, ere he be restored to a just sense of his earthly condition, and of his earthly circumstances—so surely must there be a distinct awakening made to pass on the dark, and torpid, and overborne

faculties of us all, ere the matters of faith come to be clothed to our eye in the characters of certainty, and we be made truly to apprehend the bearing in which we stand to the God who is now looking over us, to the eternity which is now ready to absorb us.

This awakening calls for a peculiar and a preternatural application. We say preternatural, for such is the obstinacy of this sleep of nature, that no power within the compass of nature can put an end to it. It withstands all the demonstrations of arithmetic. Time moves on without disturbing it. The last messenger lifts many a note of preparation; but so deep is the lethargy of our text, that he is not heard. Every year do his approaching footsteps become more distinct and more audible—yet every year rivets the affections of the votary of sense more tenaciously than before, to the scene that is around him. One would think, that the fall of so many acquaintances on every side of him, might at length have reached an awakening conviction into his heart. One would think, that standing alone, and in mournful survey amid the wreck of former associations, the spell might have been already broken, which so fastens him to a perishable world. O why were the tears he shed over his children's grave, not followed up by the deliverance of his soul from this sore infatuation? Why, as he hung over the dying bed of her with whom he had so oft taken counsel about the plans and the interests of life, did he not catch a glimpse of this world's vanity, and did not the light of truth break in upon his heart from the solemn and apprehended realities

beyond it? But no. The enchantment, it would appear, is not so easily dissolved. The deep sleep which the Bible speaks of, is not so easily broken. The conscious infirmities of age cannot do it. The frequent and touching specimens of mortality around us, cannot do it. The rude entrance of death into our own houses, and the breaking up of our own families, cannot do it. The melting of our old society away from us, and the constant succession of new faces, and new families, in their place, cannot do it. The tolling of the funeral bell, which has rung so many of our companions across the confines of eternity, and in a few little years, will perform the same office for us, cannot do it. It often happens, in the visions of the night, that some fancied spectacle of terror, or shriek of alarm, have frightened us out of our sleep, and our dream together. But the sleep of worldliness stands its ground against all this. We hear the moanings of many a death-bed; and we witness its looks of imploring anguish; and we watch the decay of life, as it glimmers onwards to its final extinction; and we hear the last breath; and we pause in the solemn stillness that follows it, till it is broken in upon by the bursting agony of the weeping attendants; and in one day more, we revisit the chamber of him, who, in white and shrouded stateliness, lies the effigy of what he was; and we lift the border that is upon the dead man's countenance, and there we gaze on that brow so cold, and those eyes so motionless; and, in two days more, we follow him to his sepulchre, and mingled with the earth, among which he is to be laid, we behold the skulls

and the skeletons of those who have gone before him; and it is the distinct understanding of nature, that soon shall have every one of us to go through the same process of dying, and add our mouldering bodies to the mass of corruption that we have been contemplating. But mark the derangement of nature, and how soon again it falls to sleep among the delusions of a world, of the vanity of which it has recently got so striking a demonstration. Look onwards but one single day more, and you behold every trace of this loud and warning voice dissipated to nothing. The man seemed, as if he had been actually awakened; but it was only the start and the stupid glare of a moment, after which he has lain him down again among the visions and the slumbers of a soul that is spiritually dead. He has not lost all sensibility any more than the man that is in a midnight trance, who is busied with the imaginations of a dream. But he has gone back again to the sensibilities of a world which he is so speedily to abandon; and in these he has sunk all the sensibilities of that everlasting world, on the confines of which he was treading but yesterday. All is forgotten amid the bargains, and the adventures, and the bustle, and the expectation of the scene that is immediately around him. Eternity is again shut out; and amid the dreaming illusions of a fleeting and fantastic day, does he cradle his infatuated soul into an utter unconcern about its coming torments, or its coming triumphs.

Yes! we have heard the man of serious religion denounced as a visionary. But if that be a vision which is a short-lived deceit, and that be a sober

reality which survives the fluctuations both of time and of fancy—tell us if such a use of the term be not an utter misapplication; and whether with all the justice, as well as with all the severity of truth, it may not be retorted upon the head of him, who, though prized for the sagacity of a firm, secular, and much-exercised understanding, and honoured in the market-place for his experience in the walks and the ways of this world's business, has not so much as entered upon the beginning of wisdom, but is toiling away all his skill and all his energy on the frivolities of an idiot's dream.

SERMON II.

ON THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND CONSIDERATION.

"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."—ISAIAH i. 3.

IT would appear, from this verse, that the children of Israel neither knew nor considered—but still there is a distinction suggested by it between these two things. And in the book of the prophet Malachi, we have a similar distinction, when the Lord says to the priests, "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart." It is, in fact, possible for a man to do one of these things, and not to do the other. He may know the truth, and yet he may not consider it. He may hear, and yet not lay it to heart. Nay, he may have heard of a particular doctrine so often as to have got it by heart, without ever laying it to heart. And this, we hold, to be the just and the applicable complaint that may be uttered of many professing Christians in our day.

And thus it is, that we may gather the difference which there is between knowledge and wisdom. The one is a speculative acquirement. The other is a practical faculty or habit. By the latter, we turn to its right and profitable use the former.

Thus it is, that there may be great folly along with great scholarship—and, on the other hand, may an unlettered mind be illustrious in wisdom. You have, perhaps, seen when there was great wealth, and yet, from the want of judicious management, great want of comfort in a family—and what stands in fine and beautiful contrast with this, you may have witnessed the union of very humble means, with such a skill and consideration in the guidance of them, as to have yielded a respectable appearance, and a decent hospitality, and the sufficiency of a full and regular provision. And so, with the treasures of intellect, the acquisitions of the mind, whereof one may be rich, being possessed of most ample materials in all knowledge and information, and yet have an ill-conditioned mind notwithstanding; and another destitute of all but the most common and elementary truths, may yet, by a wise application of them, have attained to the true light and harmony of the soul, and be in sound preparation both for the duties of time, and for the delights of eternity.

All have so learned to number their days as to know the extreme limit of human life upon earth—yet all have not so learned to number their days as to apply their hearts unto wisdom. They are aware of their latter end, but they consider not their latter end.

I. This distinction between knowledge and wisdom, is abundantly realised even on the field of earthly and of sensible experience. The man of dissipation may have his eyes open to the ruin of

character and of fortune that awaits him, yet the tyranny of his evil desires constrains him to a perseverance in the ways of wretchedness. The man of indolence may foresee the coming bankruptcy that will ensue on the slovenly management of his affairs, yet there is a lethargy within that weighs him down to fatal inactivity. The man of prone and headlong irritation, may be able to discern the accumulating mischief that he raises against himself in the hostility of those who are around him, and may even look forward to the time when, deserted by the friendship of all, he shall live a neglected outcast from all human companionship; yet, continue as before to be hurried away by the onward violence that seizes him. In all these instances, there is no want of knowledge in possession. But there is a want of knowledge in use, or knowledge in application. The unhappy man has the truth of the matter in his head. But he does not lay it with the authority of a commander upon his practice. The present urgency carries it over all thought of the future consequences. He has received the truth, but he does not give heed unto the truth. He does not charge it upon his attention, or give effectual warning of it to his fears, or to his sense of prudence and of interest. It is not of his ignorance that we complain, but of his inconsideration. And thus, apart from the things of spiritual contemplation altogether, and on the mere ground of every day life, with its passions and pursuits in this world, may the distinction to which we now advert, be abundantly exemplified.

II. But what we have now affirmed, even of those events and consequences that take place along the journey of this world, is still more strikingly apparent of that great event which marks its termination. There is not a human creature of most ordinary mind, and who hath overstepped the limits of infancy, that does not know of death, and with whom it does not rank among the most undoubted of the certainties that await him. And it is not only that of which he is most thoroughly assured—but it is that of which, in the course of observation and history, he is most constantly reminded. And many are the aids and the accompaniments which might serve to deepen his impression of it. The horror of every death that he witnesses; and the pathos of every death which he deplores; and the distress, even unto the measure of tragic sensibility, which is felt when some tie of near and affecting relationship is broken; and every act of attendance on those last obsequies, when acquaintances meet to carry one of their number to his grave; and the aspect of seriousness that gathers upon every inquiring neighbourhood, when the word spreads that some one of their friends is dying; and the frequency of those funeral processions that pass along our streets, and so mingle the business of death with the moving throng of the people and the carriages, which the business of life has pressed into its service—these are the remembrancers that ever and anon hold up the lesson of our mortality, and, one might think, should effectually keep it from sinking for a single hour into oblivion. But how is it truly and experi-

mentally? That death of which we all know so well, is scarcely ever in our thoughts. The momentary touch of grief, and of seriousness, wherewith we are at times visited, speedily goeth into utter dissipation. With as cheerful and assured footsteps, do we tread the face of this world, as if it were the scene of our immortality—and the latter end of life is totally unseen in the obscure and undefined distance at which we have placed it, on the field of our contemplations. It argues for the strength of that recoil with which nature shrinks from the thought of its own dissolution, that all these loud and repeated demonstrations pass so unheeded by—and that walking though we be, over the accumulated ruins of so many generations, we nevertheless will talk as merrily, and lift up our heads as securely, as though beings who were to live for ever. It seems not to work the slightest abatement in the eagerness of man after this world's interests, that a few years will sweep them utterly away—and when we look to the busy engrossment of all his faculties with the plans and the pursuits of earthliness, it is but too manifest, that it is one thing to know of death, and another to consider of it.

This heedlessness of our latter end, is of a character still more obstinate and incurable than any such heedlessness as we have already quoted, of reputation or fortune in the world. It needs no impetuous appetite to overbear the thought of death; for in the calm equanimity of many a sober and aged citizen, you will find him as profoundly asleep to the feeling of his own mortality, as he is to any of

the feelings or instigations of licentiousness. It needs no overweighing indolence of temperament to be all listless and unmoved by the fears of our coming death-bed; for many are to be found, who consume every hour in the activities of business and of daring adventure, without one emotion of seriousness on the awful catastrophe that awaits them. It needs no imprudence, or unguarded violence, to betray a man into the forgetfulness of death; for many is the cool and practised calculator, and many is the sage of tranquil philosophy, and many is the crafty politician, who can look far into consequences, and is skilled in all the expedients of his vocation—and of whom it may be said, that the mind of each is steeped in the oblivion of death. We are heedless of much that is before us, even in this world; but as to its last and closing scene, there is a peculiar inveteracy of heedlessness that we do not have as to any of the other futurities of our earthly existence. Death is the stepping-stone between the two worlds; and so it somewhat combines the palpable of matter, with the shadowy and the evanescent of spirit. It is the gateway to a land of mystery and of silence, and seems to gather upon it something of the visionary character which the things of faith have to the eye of the senses. It is not a thing unseen; but being an outlet to the region of invisibles, there settles upon it a degree of that faintness and obscurity wherewith the carnal eye regards all that is told of the matters of eternity. And so, amid all the varieties of temperament in our species, there is a universal heedlessness of death. It seems against the ten-

dency of nature to think of it. There is an opposite bias that ever inclines us away from this dark contemplation, towards the warm and living realities of the peopled world around us. The mind refuses to dwell on that dreary abode of skulls and of sepulchres, and makes its willing escape from all this hideous imagery, to society, and to business, and to the whole interest and variety of life. Instead of some mighty impulse being required to dispossess us of the thought, it costs an effort of unnatural violence to uphold it in our bosoms. The thing is known, but it is not considered: and the giddy dance of life is carried onwards, as if there were no destroyer upon the way—the tide of human existence is borne as restlessly along, as if there were no grave to absorb it.

This might serve to convince us, how unavailing is the mere knowledge, even of important truth, if not accompanied by the feeling, or the practical remembrance of it. The knowledge, in this case, only serves to aggravate our folly, and to bring, on the utter heedlessness of our lives, a more full and emphatic condemnation. And on the subject of death, we would ask, how is it that your fatal insensibility can be justified? Has God left this matter without a witness? Has He not strewed the whole path of your existence in the world with the mementoes of its affecting termination? Has He not pointed the eye of your experience to the agonies of many a death-bed, and brought it irresistibly down upon your convictions, that these are the very agonies through which you have to pass? In every death of an acquaintance does He not

lift a voice of warning unto yourselves—and when that acquaintance is a relative or a friend, does He not seek to grave upon your softened heart the lesson of mortality in characters of deeper remembrance? Has he not tried to find access for the truth, through the varied avenues of feeling, and of observation, and of conscience? And living, as you do, in the land of dying men, have you not seen enough of this world's changes to make the history of your life one continued sermon upon the grave? God has not been wanting in those demonstrations of Providence, which should have riveted a seriousness upon your hearts, and transformed you out of the careless, and gay, and worldly creature that you still are. We protest, by the many sick-beds over which you have hung, and by the deaths which you have witnessed, and by the tears which you have shed over them, that you have long ago had enough to loosen your hold upon earth, and to break that accursed spell by which you are so bound to its lying vanities. You have enough to dislodge from your bosom the spirit of the god of this world; and O! therefore, that you were wise, that you understood these things, that you considered your latter end.

There is no topic on which the distinction that there is between knowledge and consideration stands more palpably before us, than that of death. All are assured of its coming; yet how few so bethink, or so bestir themselves, as to be prepared for its coming. The position which this event occupies in the line of our existence, gives to it a peculiar advantage for illustrating the distinction in question.

It stands on the extreme horizon of what is sensible, and beyond it lie the dimness and the mystery of an untrodden land. On this side of it are the matters of experience. On the other side of it are the matters of faith. Now, it partakes with the one in the certainty wherewith all must regard it; and it partakes with the other in the nullity of its practical influence, over the vast majority of our species. As an object of knowledge, there belongeth to it the assurance of a most unquestioned truth; as an object of consideration, there belongeth to it the airy lightness of a vain and visionary fable. It is believed, but it is not minded; and while, on the one hand, it ranks among those experimental realities which are most assuredly known, it, on the other hand, ranks among those illusions of the fancy which are practically and habitually disregarded. It stands forth to the eye in all the plainness of ocular demonstration, and yet with as little power as if it were a tale of necromancy. It is quite obvious, that in the things of faith, there is a want of ascendant power over the life of man; and, to justify man, this has been ascribed to their want of evidence. But where is the want of evidence in death? This is not a thing of faith, but a thing of observation; and makes it as clear as day, that even when the evidence is complete and irresistible, the effect may be as utterly unsubstantial, as if it were a thing of nought. This ought to alarm us. It should lead us to apprehend, that there was enough of argument, on the side even of what is spiritual and unseen, to condemn our indifference to it. If the certainty of death do not move us, it may not be the uncertainty

of what is on the other side of death, that can account for the sluggishness of our obstinate and unmoved carnality. One thing is certain, that we can see an acquaintance fall into his grave, and yet continue to live here, as if this were our eternity. And does not this make it probable, that though that acquaintance were to rise again, and to tell us of the world of spirits upon which he had entered, we should be unaffected as before by the real eternity that is awaiting us? Christ says to us himself, that if we believe not Moses and the prophets, neither should we believe though one rose from the dead. This is the way in which we meet the demand of infidelity, for more of proof, and more of information. The fact is, that thousands have died before us, and are still dying around us; and yet the heart of man remains unvisited by any practical sense of his mortality. And the presumption, therefore, is, that though one of these thousands were to revive, and to re-appear amongst us, fraught with the tidings of heaven's glory, and hell's unutterable despair, we should still keep our ground against him; and the heart of man be unvisited as before, by any practical sense of his immortality. It is not more of evidence that we want. There is as much as ought to convince us now—and if not convinced, there is as much as will condemn us afterwards. The cause of our irreligion is not that we could not know, but that we do not, and will not consider.

This is a great practical use to which our insensibility about death is capable of being turned. It proves, that our insensibility about eternal things,

may be due to something else than to the defect of that evidence by which they are accompanied. It causes us to perceive, that a truth may be surely known, and yet not be pondered, or not be proceeded upon. Surely to know it is one thing—seriously to reflect upon it is another—and thus it may be, that the irreligion of the world is due not to the want of a satisfying demonstration on God's part, for this might have excused us; but, to the want of right consideration on ours, and this is inexcusable.

III. Let us now pass onwards, then, to the invisibles of faith—to those things which do not, like death, stand upon the confines of the spiritual region, but are wholly within that region, and which man hath not seen by his eye, or heard by his ear—to the awful realities that will abide in deep and mysterious concealment from us, so long as we are in the body, and which not till the body is dissolved, will stand in direct manifestation before us. This character of unseen and spiritual, is not confined to things future. There are things present which are spiritual also. There is a present Deity, who dwelleth in light, it is true; but it is light inaccessible—who is encompassed with glory; but it is glory which we, in the body, cannot approach unto—who stands revealed to angels and adoring spirits; but whom no man hath seen, neither can see. He is the King eternal and immortal, but He is also the King invisible—who, though not far from any one of us, is remote as infinity itself, from the ken of our earthly senses—and shrouded in the obscurity of His own unfathomable nature, is He so veiled

and darkened from all human contemplation, that we cannot behold him.

And yet, even of this great Spirit we may be said, in one sense, to know, however little it is that we may consider Him. There are averments about God which we have long recognized, and ranked among our admitted propositions, though we seldom recur to them in thought, and are never adequately impressed by them. We know, or think we know, that God is; and that all other existence is suspended upon His will; and that, were it not for His upholding arm, the whole of Nature would go into dissolution; and that while He sits in high authority over all worlds, there is not one individual member of His vast family, that is overlooked by Him—and, more particularly, that He looks with the eye of a wise and a watchful judge, into every heart, and every conscience; and that He claims a right and a property in the services of all His creatures; and that He is more absolutely the owner and the master of them all, than is man of the machine that he hath made, and to whose touch all its movements are subordinate; and that he is a God of august and unviolable sacredness, in whose presence evil cannot dwell, and between the sanctity of whose nature and sin, there is a wide and implacable enmity; and that He does not sit in lofty and remote indifference to the characters of His children, but takes deep, and perpetual, and most vigilant concern in them all—loving their righteousness, hating their iniquity, treasuring their thoughts, and their purposes, and their doings, in the book of His remembrance; and that, with a

view to the manifestation of them, on that day, when time shall be no more, and each of His accountable offspring shall have their condition awarded to them through eternity—when the mystery of God shall be finished, and the glory of His attributes shall be made to shine forth at the close and the consummation of all things.

Now, most of these things you know, or profess to know. They are recognized by you as true propositions, and not to have them among the articles of your creed, would be deemed by you as monstrous and revolting infidelity. Most of you would shudder at the thought of an atheism, which could deny the existence of God, or of a blasphemy that could disown His government, or of a heresy that could profane His character by stripping it of its truth, and justice, and holiness. So dear, in fact, are your long-established notions of the Divinity, that you could not bear them to be meddled with—and would hold that man to be the enemy of your repose, who should offer to violate them. So that, there do exist in your mind certain positions which regard a Deity, the affirmative of which carries your consent, and the denial of which would be painfully offensive to you—and thus far may you be said to know God, and to believe in Him.

Now, as a proof how distinct this knowledge of God is from the consideration of Him, we will venture to say, that even the first and simplest of all these propositions is, by many, unthought of for days and weeks together. The truth, that God is, which all here present would shudder to deny, is ut of habitual regard, and habitual remembrance.

It lies like a forgotten thing in some deep and latent depository—and as to its being brought forth of its hiding-place, for hourly use and meditation, this we never meet with, but among a saintly and selected few, who are indeed a very peculiar people. When God is acknowledged, we cannot lift the charge of theoretical atheism; but when, along with this, God is unminded, surely then may we lift the charge of practical atheism. Now this is the very charge that we prefer against the vast majority of our world. They have a knowledge of God; but this, so far from extenuating their thoughtlessness, brings upon it its most fearful aggravation. It is just because they stand pre-eminent among the creatures of our world, in the faculty of understanding God, that they also stand pre-eminent in the crime of their ungodliness. It is for this, that they suffer in the comparison with "the ox that knoweth his owner, and the ass that knoweth his master's crib"—and what they have learned of God, or are capable of learning, will bring upon their heedlessness of Him, and of His ways, its severest condemnation.

It is, indeed, one of the most fearful mysteries of the human spirit, that a truth which, of all others, most intimately concerns us, should yet, of all others, be the most gladly bidden away into oblivion—that, as rid of an unwelcome visitor, the mind of man is never more at ease, or in its kindred and rejoicing element, than when God is not in all his thoughts—that then it is, when, as broken loose from imprisonment, the heart revels in its own desires, and securely blesses its deliverance from

the hateful presence of one who constrained and overawed it—that the creature should thus hide itself, as it were, from the Creator, and in virtue of his perpetual recoil from the Being who formed, and who upholds him, should so keep up a perpetual distance from God—that wholly given over to the idolatry of the things that are made, the Maker should, to him, be little better than a nonentity, or a name—this is the marvel of the strange and wayward nature that belongs to us, and may well lead us to apprehend the visitation upon it of some sore leprosy, the shock of some great and total derangement.

For what truth of weightier import to us all than simply that there is a God—that all the busy and unceasing movements around us are suspended on the will of a living Sovereign—that those mighty forces which constantly uphold the play and the mechanism of things, are not the random energies of a Nature that is unconscious; but that one sitteth above, and wieldeth them all at His pleasure—that a powerful and a presiding intelligence hath originated all, and overrules all—and that while our only converse and concern are with the near and the visible, that are on every side of us, there is an unseen Spirit, to whom belongeth the mastery, and with whom alone it is that we have mainly and substantially to do?

Now, how is it that man practically responds to this real condition of his being? Tell us, from the intimate assurances of your own conscience, or tell us, from the broad and palpable character that sits upon the doings of your acquaintances, whether

God hath the ascendency over them. Is there, all the day long, a felt solemnity on your spirits, because of God, which follows you whithersoever you go, and causes you to walk with Him in the world? Or, are you familiarized with the habit of submitting your will to His will? Or, have you ever, for an hour together, looked upon yourselves in the light of being the servants of another, and have accordingly run and laboured as at the bidding of that other? Or, utter strangers to this, do you not walk in the counsel of your own heart? Do you not move as independently, as if in yourself it was that you lived, and moved, and had your being? In the work that you prosecute, and the comforts that you enjoy, and even the obligations of which you acquit yourselves to relatives, and to friends, is there any fear of God before your eyes? —and is not the fear of disgrace from men, a far more powerful check upon your licentiousness, than the fear of damnation from Him who is the judge and the discerner of men? The mind is ever crowded with thoughts, and wishes, and purposes, that pass, in busy succession, through its chambers of imagery, and minister the food of its unremitting contemplations. Tell me how much of God and of godliness there is in them all. Turn the inward survey upon yourselves, and report to us how much of this heavenly fruit groweth and flourisheth there. O you have but spied the nakedness of the land—God is unto you a wilderness, and your heart is as to Him a spiritual desolation!

This emptiness of a man's heart as to the recog-

nition of God, runs throughout the whole of his history. He is engrossed with what is visible and secondary, and he thinks no farther. The sense of a present and presiding Deity, is habitually absent from his soul—and just because he will not stir himself up to consideration, that he may lay hold of God, is he bounded, as if by an impassable limit, to earth and to earthliness. It needs a force of thought and of reflection, to bear him across this barrier, which, whether from indolence, or carnality, or a misgiving conscience, he does not choose to put into operation—and thus, does he live without God in the world. When he enjoys, it is without gratitude. When he labours, it is without the impulse of an obedient loyalty. When he admires, it is without carrying the sentiment upwardly unto heaven, whence all that is lovely on the face of our world, was strewn for its embellishment, and the delight of its beholders. And thus, may a traveller on his tour of recreation, through some goodly land, be carried forward from scene to scene, till the whole landscape of an empire shall have passed behind him like a shifting panorama—and, as he eyes the beauteous succession of verdant fields, and massy foliage, and the many pictures of comfort or elegance in human habitations, and the rapid variety wherewith, in the speed and the turning of his movements, he is, at one time, closed upon by the limits of a sweet and sequestered valley, and, at another, breaks out in full and open perspective, on the glories of half a province—why, may all the ecstasy he feels be lavished on the spectacles before him, without one thought of that

master hand, which spread out the whole of this magnificence, and poured the tide of lustre over it. No piety may mingle with this contemplation—and, not for the want of knowledge but the want of thought, may there be as little of God in the eye of this raptured enthusiast, as in the brute unconscious gaze of the creature that hath no understanding.

Now, this is God's controversy with man in the text. He there complains of our heedlessness. He feels Himself slighted, that we so seldom think of Him, and that He should be thus neglected and set at nought, by his own offspring. And this inconsideration of ours, is matter of blame, just because it is a matter of wilfulness. Man has a voluntary control over his thoughts. He can turn and transfer them from one object of mental contemplation to another. He may think of God when he chooses. He may recal his scattered imaginations, and summon all that is within him to an act of attendance upon God. He may bid his mind cease from its rambles, and its reveries, and lift itself up to the abode of the Eternal. He may lay an arrest on the processes of the inner man, and say to it, with authority, that now is the moment for an aspiration, or a solemn feeling towards God. He may repeat and multiply this effort into a habit of seriousness. It may mix itself in with his ordinary business. It may accompany him on his walk, even through the streets of the crowded city. It may season the hours of his social fellowship; and what, at first, is difficult, and irregular, and rare, may thus, by dint of persever-

ance, settle down into an habitual tendency. He may, at length, be familiarized to the thought of God, as his master and his owner—and, at length, putting on the attitude of a daily and hourly obedience, as the eye of a servant looketh towards his master, so may his eye be ever towards God. This is not the attitude of nature; but it may be tried and practised, and, at length, effectually learned. But you will never reach it, unless you begin; you will never succeed in it, unless you persevere. And, therefore, my plain advice to you is, that you now set to it in good earnest. Lay a mandate upon your thinking faculty, and send it heavenward to God. There is many a useless moment that may thus be turned to account —many an idle waste in our existence, that may thus be reclaimed to sacredness. This is true spiritual education—the practice of godliness, instead of the theory—the way of going about it; and by which the soul may, at length, be disciplined to the habit of setting God always before it.

It is the absence of this habit which constitutes the ungodliness of man. There cannot be a fouller provocation than that man should be satisfied to do without God—and this is the provocation inflicted by all who have other cares and other pleasures, which take up the whole of their hearts, and have no room there for God or for godliness. Each of you can best tell whether you fall under this description of habit and of character. Is it not the truth now, that God is scarcely in all your thoughts? —that you feel no encouragement in any of His promises, neither do you tremble under the fearful-

ness of His denunciations? that you are otherwise employed than in the prosecution of your interest with Him? and are busied with plans, and objects, and anticipations of your own, wherewith His will, and His glory, have nothing to do? This is your guilt. This, in the estimation of Heaven's jurisprudence, is the very essence of sinfulness. Quite consistent, we do admit, with much to soften and much most honourably to signalize you—but involving you in the direct charge, that none of you understandeth, and none of you seeketh after God.

IV. But the distinction between those who only know, and those who also consider, is never more strongly marked than in the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. And fearful is the hazard, lest knowledge, and it alone, should satisfy the possessor; lest he should settle down into a treacherous complacency, because he has made a right adjustment of the articles of his creed; lest he count it enough, that he has acquiesced, at all points, in the orthodoxy of the question; and so come forth with a flaming Christianity, that lies more in dogmatism than in devotion, more in a sturdy intolerance of error, than in a true and tender sincerity of heart. And the very controversies of the church have served to foster this delusion. The very quantity of debate and of argument that has been expended on theology, leads to a most hurtful misconceiving of this matter. You know, that the design of argument is to carry you onward to a set of just and accurate convictions. This, in fact, is the landing place to which it brings you, and at which it leaves

you; and the danger is, that having brought you there, you go no further—and this place of arrival becomes your place of rest, and stationary residence. It is the pride, and the ambition, and the zeal of every intellectual combatant, to carry the understanding of his reader—and having done this, he is apt to sit down and be satisfied with the triumphs of his gotten victory; and the scholar himself, seized with the very same infection, may sit down, too, as if he had attained an ultimate good, in which he may rejoice, and where he may now securely and fearlessly repose. And yet, the whole amount of his acquisition may be a mere notional Christianity—a list of doctrines that are settled and set by—that are as much within the grasp of his knowledge as many other articles of human speculation and science—but are just as little reiterated upon as they by a habit of frequent and feeling consideration. And hence a familiar exhibition to all who live in this our scholastic land, where a people, fresh from their catechisms, are primed and charged with orthodoxy, and all whose articles stand before you in well-marshalled and metaphysical array—who have a religion in their heads, but that has there an almost exclusive occupancy—whom many a stout defender of the faith would rejoice in as his own, but in whom the Author and the Finisher of faith, finds little of that love or that obedience which to Him are the alone tests of discipleship—a people whom none can challenge for ignorance, but whose still unmortified tempers, and still unabated worldliness, may prove, that though they do know, yet they do not consider.

It were well, if such a people could be extricated from the strongholds of their yet impregnable antinomianism. It were well to alarm their conscience with the saying, that no knowledge and no belief will give them justification, which does not give sanctification also. All their doctrinal acquirements are precisely of as little avail as is the knowledge of death, if they think not of dying—or, as their knowledge of a God, if they give no earnest heed to Him. It is well that they know; but the blessing is turned into a condemnation and a curse, if, while they know, they do not consider.

There are no topics on which there has been so much of controversy, or that has given rise to so many an elaborate dissertation, as the person and offices of Christ. And, doubtless, the scholarship has been well employed, that rescued from the entanglements of sophistry, the precious truth of the divinity of our Saviour. And well may England rejoice in those lettered ecclesiastics, who have put down, as far as argument could do it, the infidelity that decried the truth of His high and heavenly apostleship. And worthier far, than all the revenue of all her colleges, is the return of criticism and of demonstration that they have made in behalf of His great sacrifice, and of His unchangeable and ever-during priesthood. Yet, let it not be disguised, that the knowledge of all these *credenda* is one thing, and the serious, the practical consideration of them, is another—that many a commentator has mastered the difficulties of the question, who has not been solemnized by the thought of its urgent and affecting realities—that stalled orthodoxy, with

her clear understanding, but untouched heart, has often launched upon heresy her mighty fulminations, and manfully asserted the truth which she never felt—that the peasant may catch direct from his Bible, what the dignitary has gathered by wading through the erudition of distant centuries; and this veriest babe in literature may outstrip the literary giant, because he not only knows the truth, but wisely and duteously considers it.

Let us, in like manner, look unto Jesus with the eye of a plain Christian, instead of looking to him with the eye of a profound critic, or commentator. For this purpose, let us lay hold of things that are palpably and unambiguously told of Him, and see whether, without learning of Him that which we do not know, much might not be made by considering of Him that which we do know—and whether, out of such materials of thought as are within reach of all, there might not a far more solemn impression come upon the heart, and a far more powerful influence upon the character, than are to be witnessed even among the most zealous and declared professors of our day.

First, then, He is the Apostle of our profession, or we profess Him to be our Apostle.* Let us consider Him as such. Let us bethink ourselves of all which this title implies. It means one who is sent. The twelve were called apostles, because sent to preach the Gospel unto every creature. And, in like manner, He too is an Apostle, because sent by His Father into the world. He came to

* Heb. iii. 1. "*Consider* the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus."

us from a place of deep and unknown mystery—He traversed that domain which separates the land of spirits from the peopled and familiar land in which we dwell—he burst upon our senses from a region where all is invisible—and far more wonderful than if He had been a visitor from another planet than our own, did He light upon our world from the dwelling-place of Him who is the uncreated source of all worlds, from the very abode and sanctuary of the Eternal. How it ought to move us with awe at the approach of such a messenger, when we think of the glory and the sacredness of His former habitation!—of those ineffable communions that He had with the Father before the world was—and deep insight into all those mysteries of God, that are to us unsearchable! How it ought to fasten upon it the gaze of every mortal eye, that on the shore of our world there has been an arrival from the dark and the shrouded infinity which lies beyond it—that, at length, out of realms which are afar, a traveller hath come; and that, though veiled from everlasting in the obscurity of a remote and lofty nature, He hath now stood revealed to the observation of human senses, and poured forth an utterance that can be taken up by human ears!

And what ought to fasten upon Him a still more intense regard, He comes with a message to our world—He comes straight from the Divinity Himself, and charged by Him with a special communication—God had broken silence, and this great Apostle of our profession was the bearer of that voice which speaketh from heaven unto the children of men. It was a thing of mighty import in-

deed, that there should have been an actual errand to us from the pavilion of the Almighty's residence —that one familiarly acquainted there should have come to tabernacle here, and to enter upon converse and companionship with men—that He did announce himself, and on satisfying credentials, to have been sent amongst us from the upper paradise, with tidings that He had to deliver, and on a work that had been given Him to do. And it ought, at least, to make no difference, that now he has returned to the place from whence He came. For He left behind Him the records of His wondrous embassy—and the authentic and the authoritative voice of heaven still speaketh to us there—and with our hands upon the Bible, we are in contact with the very materials of a communication from the Deity. In the breast of the Godhead, there was a motion and a desire towards our species, and here is the expression of it—the very transcript of that message which our Apostle brought, and which our Apostle left amongst us—the word that actually came from the secret place of the Eternal, and is fraught with those revealed things, which now belong to us and to our children. We declare not a novelty in your hearing. It is not a matter of which you are ignorant, and which you need to know. But it is a matter of which you are wofully heedless, and which you need to consider. We do not need to teach you what is new. But we need to arrest you by the sense of what is old and forgotten. We charge your neglect of the Scriptures of our faith upon your neglect of that great Apostle, who is the Author and the Finisher

of our faith. By your daily indifference to the word that is written, you inherit all the guilt, and will come under the very reckoning of those, who, in the days of the Saviour, treated with neglect and indifference, the word that was spoken. Our challenge against you is, that the Bible is to you a thing of insipidity—that it is not desired by you as the aliment of your souls—that though unread for days together, you miss no necessary food, you feel no vacancy, you are visited with no hunger, you can do very well without this nourishment of the spiritual life, and so give reason to fear, that within you there is no spiritual principle to sustain. And looking unto that of which this written document is the memorial, do we charge upon all who slight the perusal of it, that they trample into insignificance a formal embassy from heaven—that they treat with contumely the messenger who came thenceforth unto our world—that God by him has spoken, and they have disregarded—that the daily spectacle of the Bible before their eyes, is a daily solicitation on the part of Christ to be heard, and by their continued heedlessness to which, they, all their lives, set his character, as an Apostle, utterly to scorn.

The way to repair this treatment, is forthwith to give your diligence unto the book—and to press upon your moral sense, as you open it, that now you are about to enter into converse with God—and thus to fix and solemnize your attention, while you read those words of which Christ may be called the Apostle or the messenger. The act of reading the Bible, is the act of holding conference with the

Deity—and while this is what all know, this is what few consider.

There is one topic which stands connected with the apostleship of Christ, and that stamps a most peculiar interest on the visit which He made to us from on high. He is God manifest in the flesh. In the character of a man, hath He pictured forth to us the attributes of the Divinity. He is the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person—yet, in virtue of the humanity wherewith he is invested, hath he offered, even to the eye of sense, a palpable representation of the Godhead. "He who hath seen me, hath seen the Father"—and we, by fastening our attentive regards upon his person and history, may gather the very aspect and lineaments of the King invisible. That Being, who had been so long wrapt in profoundest secrecy from our world—that Being, whom none could apprehend, for no eye of mortal could carry him through that dark and untrodden interval, by which the two regions of sense and of spirit stand apart from each other—the Being, who ever since the entrance of sin, had laid His jealous interdict on the approaches of our species, and withdrawn Himself by a remote and lofty separation away from us—He, at length, broke out from this veil of deepest mystery; and in the person of Him who is at once His representative and His Apostle, does He now stand before us in visible manifestation. And we, by considering this Apostle, learn of God. By looking unto Him, we look unto the likeness of our Creator, and we become acquainted with Him. In the purity, and the gentleness,

and the simple majesty of Christ, do we read the characteristics of the Deity. And O how it concerns us to know, from this narrative of unwearied well-doing, that there is so much of benevolence in heaven—that the Sovereign who sits in high authority there, is as good as He is great—that there is a meekness to soften the majesty of His nature, and a compassionate longing after those men whom the hand of justice was lifted up to destroy—that even in the holy of holies, there dwells a tenderness for our degraded species—and could the securities of heaven's throne only be upholden, that there were a good-will and a mercy on high, ready to burst forth upon our world, and to circulate, at large, over all its families.

But this leads us to another topic of consideration, the priesthood of Christ. The atonement that He made for sin has a foremost place in orthodoxy. It is reiterated in all our catechisms. It forms the burden and the argument of many a ponderous dissertation. And to the popular mind, too, is it fully as familiar as to the accomplished scholar in theology. Insomuch, that scarcely an individual can be met with, even in the humblest walks of society, who does not know, and who could not tell, that Christ died for the world. But as we have often said, there is a knowledge without consideration. A truth may be acquired, and then cast, as it were, into some hidden corner of the mind, may it lie forgotten, as in a dormitory. And thus it fares with many a precious doctrine of the Bible. We learn it most readily from the question-book. We give the vote to it of our most prompt

and zealous affirmative. We enlist it among the articles of our creed—and espousing it as our own belief, do we become partizans, or even advocates in its favour. And yet all this may consist with an entire practical heedlessness—with a deep torpor and unconcern about that truth which may have come to us most abundantly in word, though not at all in power. The soul may be habitually inadvertent to that as a principle, which is most zealously professed, and even contended for as an opinion. And accordingly, we are told by the apostle, of this very doctrine, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, how possible it is for men to receive it, yet not to remember it—that they may have once committed it to their understanding, as an article of faith, without having charged it upon their memory as an article of hourly and habitual recurrence—that it may have been consented to by the mind, without being dwelt upon by the mind—in which case, says Paul, you have believed in vain; and just because you keep not in memory, or, rather, consider not, and call not up to memory, that which I have preached unto you.*

And, therefore, would we again bid you consider Him who is the High Priest of your profession. We call upon you ever and anon to think of His sacrifice—and to ward off the legality of nature from your spirits, by a constant habit of recurrence, upon your part, to the atonement that He hath made, and to the everlasting righteousness that He hath brought in. Without this, the mind is ever

* 1 Cor. xv. 2.

lapsing anon into alienation and distrust—and the habitual jealousy of guilt, when not met, at all times, by a sense of that blood which washeth it away, will throw us back again to our wonted distance from God—and instead of breathing the free air of confidence in Him, or rejoicing in the sunshine of His reconciled countenance, there will be a flaw of suspicion in all our intercourse, and instead of loving Him as a friend, we shall still stand in dread of Him as an accuser. There may be the occasional recognition of Christ, and, perhaps, along with it a gleam of light and of liberty. But the general state will be, that of a mind which is overcast. And, therefore, to keep all clear, and habitually clear, would we advise a regular forthgoing of your believing thoughts, to the great decease that was accomplished at Jerusalem. We would have you to look unto Jesus Christ, and unto Him crucified, and be lightened thereby. Forget not that for guilt there has been an appropriate remedy provided in the Gospel—and the way for you to stand delivered from all your fears of its vengeance and its agony, is to think of the vengeance that has already been poured out, and of the agony that has already been endured for it. Be very sure, that when justice is satisfied, then mercy, set at large from this obstruction, is free to rejoice over you. And justice is satisfied. The sufferings of the garden and the cross, have absorbed it all—nor after Christ hath poured out His soul unto the death for you, will it seek, in the horrors of your condemned eternity, for a double redress, and a double vindication. O come out

then from the prison-house of despondency—and, when you think of your sins, think also of the ransom which has been paid for them. On the strength of this, do make your resolute stand against the spirit of bondage—and looking, and looking hourly unto the victim who has already bled a full expiation, do uphold yourself in the confidence, that sin is made an end of, that transgression is finished, that reconciliation for iniquity is made, and that now the believer, released from captivity, may walk before God in the security and the triumph of an everlasting righteousness.

In other sacrifices, the priest is distinguishable from the victim. Here they are the same. He was the victim when dying. He is the High Priest, now that He is risen again. And thus does He still plead, in the ear of God, the offering that was once made, and the power of which endureth continually. That incense, with the savour of which, God was well pleased, He is at all times well pleased to be reminded of—and only consider Him who fills His mouth with this argument in behalf of all who repair to Him, who can argue His sacrifice as an adequate redemption for the chief of sinners; and whose glory as a physician and a saviour, is most illustrated, when the most desperate of offenders come unto Him, and are healed. It is not enough, that you have, at one time, imported this into your understanding, and given it a place there among the articles of your belief. It is by keeping it in memory—it is by renewing upon it your mental acts of faith and of dependence—it is by again and again repairing to

it—and looking habitually unto Him as your Intercessor and High Priest, even as the children of Israel looked daily to Jerusalem, at the times of their morning and evening sacrifice. It is thus, that peace is kept up in the heart. It is thus, that instead of coming upon us at starts, and in the shape of a momentary visitation, it maintains the continuous flow within us, of a river that is at once mighty and inexhaustible. It is thus, that this doctrine of our faith, instead of having only once made its entrance into our creed, is used by us at all times as a cordial—and the thought of Christ, as our acceptable and all-prevailing High Priest, is often present to the mind, and always felt to be precious.

And never forget that the way to maintain peace of conscience, is also the way to maintain purity of character. This is a mystery of the Christian life which the world apprehendeth not—and yet so realized, we think, by universal experience, that never do we reckon, in the history of the church, or in any of its members, had wilful sin place at the same time along with a full exercise of faith on the testimony of God. It is peace in the conscience, in fact, that keeps up love in the heart. It is this which, by putting joy, and hope, and confidence in the bosom, furnishes the soul with the most powerful springs of obedience. It is this which awakens gratitude in the bosom, that ere now was beset with the cold abstractions of legality; and under the constraining influence of the love of Christ, is it ever found, that the most joyful believer is also the most fruitful believer, living no longer to himself, but to Christ who died for him, and who rose again.

SERMON III.

THE NATURAL ENMITY OF THE MIND AGAINST GOD.

"The carnal mind is enmity against God."—ROMANS viii. 7.

We should be blinding ourselves against the light of experience, did we deny of many of our acquaintances—that they have either brought into the world; or have acquired, by a natural process of education, such a gentleness of temper, such a docility, such a taste for the amiable and the kind, such an honourable sense of integrity, such a feeling sympathy for the wants and misfortunes of others—that it would not be easy, and what is more, we may venture to say, from the example of our Saviour, who, when he looked to the young man, loved him, that it would positively not be right, to withhold from them our admiration and our tenderness. Still it were a violation of all scriptural propriety in language, to say of them that they were not carnal, or not carnally-minded. All, by the very signification of the term, are carnal, whose minds either retain their original constitution; or have undergone no other transforming process, than a mere process of natural education. Some minds are, in these circumstances, more agreeable to look upon than others—just as some faces are more agreeable than others, to the eye. Each mind has its own

peculiar character—just as each face has its own set of features, and its own complexion. But, as all the varieties in the latter, from exquisite beauty to most revolting deformity, do not exclude from any the one and universal attribute of decay,—so neither may all the constitutional varieties in the former, from the most sordid, to the most naturally upright and amiable, exclude the possession of some one and universal attribute; and it may be the very attribute assigned to nature in the text—even hostility against God.

Let us first offer some remarks on the affirmation of the text, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God,"—and then shortly consider, how it is that the gospel of Jesus Christ suits its applications to this great moral disease.

I. It appears a very presumptuous attempt, on the part of a human interpreter, when the object which he proposes, and which he erects into a separate head of discussion, is to prove the assertion of the text. Should not the very circumstance of its being the assertion of the text, be proof enough for you? On what better foundation can your belief be laid than on the testimony of God? and when we come to understand the meaning of the thing testified, is not the bare fact of God being the witness of it, sufficient ground for its credibility to rest upon? Shall man's reasoning carry a greater authority along with it than God's declaration? Is your faith to depend on the success or the failure of his argument? Whether he succeed in establishing the truth of the assertion or not, upon

independent reasonings of his own,—remember, that by reading it out in his text, he has already come forward with an argument more conclusive than any which his ingenuity can devise. And yet, how often do your convictions lie suspended on the ability of the preacher, and on the soundness of his demonstrations? You refuse to believe truth, plainly set before you in the Bible, because the minister has failed in making out his point. Now, the truth of the point in question may have already received its decisive settlement, from the text delivered in your hearing. We may try, and take our own way of bringing the truth of your enmity against God, close and home upon your consciences; but, if there be truth in all the sayings of the Bible, enough has been already said, to undermine the security of your fancied attainments. It is said, that in our nature there is a rooted and an embodied character of hostility to our Maker. This should make the wisest and most sufficient among you feel that you are poor indeed,—and let other expedients, to press home the melancholy truth, fail, or be effectual as they may, this is surely enough to convince and to alarm you.

But, though we cannot add to the truth of God, there is such a thing as what the apostle calls making that truth manifest to your consciences. Your own observation may attest the very same truth which God announces to you in His word. And if it be a truth, respecting the state of your own heart—this agreement between what God says you are, and what you find yourselves to be, is often most powerfully instrumental, in reclaiming men to

the acknowledgment of the truth, and bringing their hearts under its influence. This is the very argument which compelled the faith of the woman of Samaria. "Come and see the man who told me all the things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" It is the very argument by which many an unbeliever was convinced in the apostle's days. The secrets of his heart were made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he worshipped God, and reported that God was in them, of a truth. We cannot make the assertion in the text stronger than God has made it already; but we may be able to guide your observations to that which is the subject of it—even to your own mind. We may lead you to attend more closely, and to view more distinctly, the state of your minds, than you have ever yet done. If your finding of the matter shall agree with God's saying about it, it may make the truth of the text tell with energy upon your consciences; —and it were well for one and all of us, that we obtained a more overwhelming sense of our necessities than we have ever yet gotten; that we saw ourselves in those true colours of deformity which really belong to us; that the inveteracy of our disease as sinners, were more known and more felt by us; that we could lift up the mantle of delusion, which the accomplishments of nature throw over the carnal mind, and by which they spread a most bewildering gloss over all the rebelliousness and ingratitude of the inner man. Could we but make you feel your need and your helplessness, as sinners, —could we chase away from you the pride and the security of your fancied attainments,—could we

lead you to mourn and be in heaviness, under a sense of your alienations and idolatries, and risings of hatred against the God who created and who sustains you; —then might we look for the overtures of the gospel being more thankfully listened to, more cordially embraced, more rejoiced in as the alone suitable remedy to the wants and the sorenesses of your fallen nature,—then might we look for the attitude of self-dependence being broken down, and for all trust, and all glorying, being transferred from ourselves, and laid upon Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

It is no proof of love to God, that we do many things, and that too with the willing consent of the mind, the performance of which is agreeable to His law. If the same thing might be done upon either of two principles—then the doing of it may only prove the existence of one of these principles, while the other has no presence or operation in the mind whatever. I do not steal; and the reason of it may be either that I love God, and so keep His commandments—or it may be that I have honourable feelings, and would spurn at the disgracefulness of such an action. This is only one example, but the bare statement of it serves for a thousand more. It lets us in at once to the decisive fact, that there are many principles of action applauded; and held in reverence; and most useful to society; and withal urging us to the performance of what, in the matter of it, is agreeable to the law of God—which may have a practical ascendancy over a man whose heart is alienated from the love of God. Propose the question to yourself, Would not I do this good thing, or abstain from this evil thing, though God had no will in the

matter? If you would; then put not down what is altogether due to other principles to the principle of love to God, or a desire of pleasing him. The principle upon which you have acted may be respectable, and honourable, and amiable. We are not disputing all this. We are only saying, that it is not the love of God; and should we hear any one of you assert, that I have nothing to reproach myself with, and that I give every body their own, and that I possess a fair character in society, and have done nothing to forfeit it, and that I have my share of generosity, and honour, and tenderness, and civility—our only reply is, that this may be very true. You may have a very large share of these, and of other estimable principles; but along with the possession of these many things, you may lack one thing, and that one thing may be the love of God. An enlightened discerner of the heart may look unto you, and say, with our Saviour, "I know you that you have not the love of God in you."

It is no test whatever of your love to God, that you tolerate Him, when He calls upon you to do the things which your natural principles incline you to do, and which you would have done at any rate. But when He claims that place in our affections which you give to many of the objects of the world —when He puts in for that share of your heart which you give to wealth, or pleasure, or reputation among men,—then is not God a weariness? and does not the inner man feel impatience and dislike at these grievous exactions? and when the will of God thwarts the natural current of your

tastes and enjoyments, is not God, at the moment of urging that will, with all the natural authority which belongs to Him, a positive offence to you?

How would you like the visit of a man whose presence broke up some arrangement that you had set your heart upon? or marred the enjoyment of some favourite scheme that you were going to put into execution? Would not you hate the visit? and if it were often repeated—if the disappointments you received from this cause were frequent and perpetual—if you saw a systematic design of thwarting you by these galling and numerous interruptions,—would not you also cordially hate the visitor, and give the most substantial evidence of your hatred too, by shunning him, or shutting him out? Now, is not God just such a visitor? O how many favourite schemes of enjoyment would the thought of Him, and of His will, if faithfully admitted to the inner chambers of the mind, put to flight! How many fond calculations be given up about the world, the love of which is opposite to the love of the Father! How many trifling amusements behoved to be painfully surrendered, if a sense of God's will were to tell upon the conscience with all the energy that is due to it! How many darling habits abandoned, if the whole man were brought under the dominion of this imperious visitor! How many affections torn away from the objects on which they are now fastened, if His presence were at all times attended to, and He was regarded with that affection which He at all times demands of us!

This may explain a fact, which we fear must

come near to the conscience of many a respectable man; and that is, the recoil which he has often experienced, as if from some object of severe and unconquerable aversion, when the preacher urges upon his thoughts some scriptural representations either of the will or the character of God. Or take this fact in another way, and in which it presents itself, if not more strikingly, at least more habitually; and that is, the undeniable circumstance of God being shut out of his thoughts for the great majority of his time, and him feeling the same kind of ease, at the exclusion, as when he shuts the door on the most unwelcome of his visitors. The reason is, that the inner man, busied with other objects, would positively be offended at the intrusion of the thought of God. It is because, to admit Him, with all His high claims and spiritual requirements, into your mind, would be to disturb you in the enjoyment of objects which are better loved and more sought after than He. It is because your heart is occupied with idols, that God is shut out of it. It is because your heart is after another treasure. It is because your heart is set upon other things. Whether it be wealth, or amusement, or distinction, or the ease and the pleasures of life, we pretend not to know; but there is a something, which is your God, to the exclusion of the great God of heaven and earth. The Being who is upholding you all the time, and in virtue of whose preserving hand you live, and think, and enjoy, is all the while unminded and unregarded by you. You look upon Him as an interruption. It is of no consequence to the

argument what the occupation of your heart be, if it is such an occupation as excludes God from it. It may be what the world calls a vicious occupation —the pursuits of a dishonest, or the debaucheries of a profligate life—and, in this case, the world has no objection to stigmatize you with enmity against God. Or it may be what the world calls an innocent occupation—amusement to make you happy, work to earn a subsistence, business to establish a liberal provision for your families. But your heart may be so given to it, that God is robbed of His portion of your heart altogether. Or it may be what the world calls an honourable occupation—the pursuit of eminence in the walks of science or of patriotism; and still there may be an exclusion, or a hatred, of the God who puts in for all things being done to His glory. Or it may be what the world calls an elegant occupation—even that of a mind enamoured with the tastefulness of literature; but it may be so enamoured with this, that the God who created your mind, and all the tastes which are within it, and all the objects which are without it, and which minister to its most exquisite gratification—this God, we say, may be turned away from with a feeling of the most nauseous antipathy, and you may give the most substantial evidence of your hatred to Him, by ridding your thoughts of Him altogether. Or, lastly, it may be what the world calls a virtuous occupation, even that of a mind bustling with the full play of its energies, among enterprises of charity and plans of public good. Yet even here, wonderful as you may think it, there may be a total

exclusion and forgetfulness of God; and, while the mind is filled and gratified with a rejoicing sense of its activity and its usefulness, it may be merely delighting itself with a constitutional gratification—and God, the author of that constitution, be never thought of,—or, if thought of according to the holiness of His attributes, and the nature of that friendship, opposite to the friendship of the world, which He demands of us, and the kind of employment which forms the reward and the happiness of His saints in eternity, even the praise and the contemplation of Himself,—if thought of, we say, according to this His real character, and these the real requirements that He lays upon us —even the man to whom the world yields the homage of virtue may think of His God with feelings of offensiveness and disgust.

There is nothing monstrous in all this, to the men of our world, seeing that they have each a share in that deep and lurking ungodliness, which has both so vitiated our nature, and so blinded all who inherit this nature against a sense of its enormity. But only conceive how it must be thought of, and how the contemplation of it must be felt, among those who can look on character, with a spiritual and intelligent estimation. How must the pure eye of an angel be moved at such a spectacle of worthlessness!—and surely, in the records of heaven, this great moral peculiarity of our outcast race must stand engraven as that which, of all others, has the character of guilt most nakedly and most essentially belonging to it. That the bosom of a thing formed should feel cold or indifferent to Him who formed

it—that not a thought or an image should be so unwelcome to man, as that of his Maker—that the creature should thus turn round on its Creator, and eye Him with disgust—that its every breath should be envenomed with hatred against Him who inspired it,—or, if it be not hatred, but only unconcern, or disinclination, that even this should be the real disposition of a fashioned and sustained being, towards the hand of his Preserver,—there is a perversity here, which time may palliate for a season, but which, under a universal reign of justice, must at length be brought out to its adequate condemnation. And on that day, when the earth is to be burnt up, and all its flatteries shall have subsided,—will it be seen of many a heart that rejoiced in the applause and friendship of this world, that, alienated from the love of God, it was indeed in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Nor does it palliate the representation which we have now given, that a God, in the fancied array of poetic loveliness—that a God of mere natural perfection, and without one other moral attribute than the single attribute of indulgence—that a God, divested of all which can make him repulsive to sinners, and, for this purpose, shorn of all those glories which truth, and authority, and holiness, throw around his character—that such a God should be idolized at times by many a sentimentalist. It would form no deduction from our enmity against the true God, that we give an occasional hour to the worship of a graven image, made with our own hands—and it is just of as little significancy to the argument, that we feel an occasional glow of affection

or of reverence, towards a fictitious being of our own imagination. If there be truth in the Bible, it is there where God has made an authentic exhibition of His nature,—and if God in Christ be an offence to you—if you dislike this way of approach —if you shrink from the contemplation of that Being, who bids you sanctify Him in your hearts, and who claims such a preference in your regard, as shall dispossess your affections for all that is earthly—if you have no relish for the intercourse of prayer, and of spiritual communion with such a God—if your memory neither love to recall Him, nor your fancy to dwell upon Him, nor He be the Being with whom you greatly delight yourself, the habitation to which you resort continually,—then be assured, that amid the painted insignificancy of all your other accomplishments, your heart is not right with God; and He who is the Father of your existence, and of all that gladdens it, may still be to you a loathing and an abomination.

Neither does it palliate the representation, which we have now offered, that we do many things with the direct object of doing that which is pleasing to God. It is true, there cannot be love where there is no desire to please; but it is as true, that there may be a desire to please where there is no love. Why, I may both hate and fear the man, whom I may find it very convenient to please; and to secure whose favour I may practise a thousand arts of accommodation and compliance. I may comply by action—but instead of complying with my will, I may abominate the necessity which constrains me. I may be subject to his pleasure in my person, and

in my performances; but you would not say, while hatred rankled within me, that I was subject to him with my mind. A sovereign may overrule the humours of a rebellious province, by the presence of his resistless military; but you would not say that there was any loyalty in this forced subordination. He may compel the bondage of their actual services; but you would not say, that it was in this part of his dominions, where the principle of subjection to him existed in the minds of the people. We have already affirmed, that though our will went along with a number of performances, which in the matter of them were agreeable to God's law—this was far from an unfailing indication of love to God; for there may be a thousand other constitutional principles, the residence and operation of which in the heart may give rise to these performances, while there was an utter distaste and hostility on our part to God. They may be done, not because God wills the doing; but because the doing falls in with our humour, or our interest, or our vanity, or our instinctive gratification. But now we are prepared to go farther, and say, that they may be done, because God wills the doing, and yet there may be an utter want of subjection in the mind to the law of God. The terror of his power may constrain you to many acts of obedience, even as the call, "Flee from the coming wrath," told on the disciples of John the Baptist. But obedience may be rendered to all the requirements of this prophet. Thieves, and swearers, and sabbath-breakers, may, under the fear of the coming vengeance, give up their respective enormities; and yet their minds be

altogether carnal, and utterly destitute of subjection to the law of God. There may be the obedience of the hand; while there is the gall of bitterness in the heart, at the necessity which constrains it. It may not be the consenting of the mind, to the law of Him whom you delight to please and to honour. Now, this is the service for which it is the aim of Christianity to prepare you. It is by putting that law, which was graven on tables of stone, upon the tablets of your heart, that it enables you to yield that obedience which is acceptable to God. He is grieved at the reluctancy of your services. No performances can satisfy Him, while your heart remains in shut and shielded alienation against Him. What He wants, is to gain the friendship and the confidence of His creatures; and He feels all the concern of a wounded and mortified father, when He knocks at the door of your heart, and finds its affections to be away from Him. He condescends to plead the matter; and with the tenderness of a disappointed father, does He say, "Wherein have I wearied you, O children of Israel? testify against me." You may fear Him; you may heap sacrifices upon His altar; you may bring the outer man to something like a slavish obedience, at His bidding,—but till your heart be subdued, by that great process, which all who are His spiritual subjects must undergo, you are carnal, and you do not love Him. Your obedience is like a body without a soul. The very principle which gives it all its value is wanting. It is this which turns the whole to bitterness. It is this which, with all the bustling activity of your services, keeps

you dead in trespasses and sins. It is this which mars every religious performance; and imparts the character of rebelliousness to every one item, in the list of your plausible and ostentatious duties. There is not one of them which is not accompanied with an act of disobedience; and that too, to the first and greatest commandment, by which we are called upon to love the Lord with all our heart, strength, and soul. Though the hand should be subject,—though the mouth should be subject,—though all the organs of the outer man should be subject,—yet it availeth nothing, if the will of the mind is not subject. I could sell all my goods to feed the poor. I could compel my hand to sign an order to that effect,—and I could keep my hand from reversing that order till it was executed. But all this I may do, says Paul, and yet have nothing, because I have not charity. It is not the act of well-doing to your neighbour, but a principle of love to your neighbour, on which God stamps the testimony of His approbation. In like manner, it is not the act of well-doing to God, but the principle of love to God, which He values;—and if this be withheld from Him, you are carnal; and, with all your painful and multiplied attempts at obedience, your mind is not subject to the law of God.

We shall conclude, at present, with two short reflections.

First, If any of you are convinced of the justness of the representations which we have now given, you will perceive, that your guilt in the sight of God, may be of a far deeper and more alarming

kind than men are generally aware of. And such a view of the matter may be quite intolerable to him who nauseates the peculiarities of the gospel, —to him who has a contempt for the foolishness of that preaching, of which the great burden is Jesus Christ, and Him crucified,—to him, in a word, whom the true description of our moral disease, must terrify or offend,—seeing that he carries a distaste in his heart toward the alone remedy, by which the disease can be met and extirpated.

But, Secondly, There is another class of people, whom such a view of the actual state of human nature ought to tranquillize, by bringing their minds out of perplexity, into a state of firm and confident decision. There are often in a congregation, a set of hearers not yet shut up into the faith, but approaching towards it,—with a growing taste for the Christianity of the New Testament, but without a full and a final acquiescence in it,—with an opening, and an enlarging sense of the importance of the gospel, but still halting between two opinions respecting it; who, in particular, are not sure where their sole dependence for salvation should be placed, whether singly upon their own performances, or singly upon the righteousness of Christ, or jointly upon both. Now, we trust that the lesson of our text may have the effect with some, of bringing this unsettled account more speedily to its termination. You may have hitherto, perhaps, been under the impression, that the condition of man was not just so bad as to require a Saviour, who must undertake the whole of his cure, and bring about the

whole of his salvation. You have attempted to share with the Saviour in the matter of your redemption. Instead of looking upon it with the eye of the apostle, as being all of grace, or all of works, you have, in some way or other, attempted a compromise between them; and this has the undoubted effect of keeping you at a distance from Christ. You have not felt your entire need of Him, and therefore you have not leaned in close and constant dependence upon Him. But let the torch of a spiritual law be lifted over your characters, and, through the guise of its external decencies, reveal to you the mountain of iniquity within; let the deformity of the heart be made known, and you become sensible of the fruitlessness of every endeavour, so long as the consent of a willing cordiality is withheld from the person and authority of God; let the utter powerlessness of all your doings, be contrasted with the perversity of your stubborn and unmanageable desires, and the case is seen in all its helplessness; —you become desperate of salvation in one way, and you are led to look for it in another way. The question, whether salvation is of grace or of works, receives its most decisive settlement;—when thus driven away, from one term of the alternative, you are compelled, as your only resource, to the other term. You feel that nothing else will do for your acceptance with God, but your acceptance of the offered Saviour. You stand at the foot of the cross,—you make an absolute surrender of yourself to the terms of the gospel.

And we know not a more blissful or a more memorable event, in the history of the human

soul, than, when convinced that there is no other righteousness than in the merits, and no other sanctification than in the grace, of the Saviour, it henceforth glories only in His cross; and now that every other expedient of reformation has been tried, and failed of its accomplishment, it takes to the remaining one of crying mightily to God, and pressing at a throne of grace, the supplication of the Psalmist, "Create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me."

One thing is certain; you are welcome, at this moment, to lay hold of the righteousness of God, in Christ Jesus; you are welcome, at this moment, to the use of His prevailing name, in your prayers to the Father; you are welcome, at this moment, to the plea of his meritorious obedience, and of his atoning death; and you are welcome, at this moment, to the promise of the Spirit, given unto all who believe, whereby the enmity of their carnal minds will be done away,—God will no longer be regarded with antipathy and disgust,—He will appear in the face of Jesus Christ as a reconciled Father,—He will pour upon you the Spirit of adoption,—you will walk before Him without fear,—and those bonds being loosed, wherewith you were formerly held, you will yield to Him the willing obedience of those whose hearts are enlarged, and who run with delight in the way of His commandments.

SERMON IV.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL TO DISSOLVE THE ENMITY OF THE HUMAN HEART AGAINST GOD.

"Having slain the enmity thereby."—EPHESIANS ii. 16.

LET us consider from this text, how it is that the gospel of Jesus Christ suits its application to the great moral disease of man's enmity to God.

The necessity of some singular expedient, for restoring the love of God to the alienated heart of man, will appear from the utter impossibility of bringing this about by any direct application of authority whatever. For, do you think, that the delivery of the law of love, in his hearing, as a positive and indispensable enactment coming forth from the legislature of heaven, will do it? You may as well pass a law making it imperative upon him to delight in pain, and to feel comfort on a bed of torture. Or, do you think, that you will ever give a practical establishment to the law of love, by surrounding it with accumulated penalties? This may irritate, or it may terrify,—but for the purpose of begetting any thing like attachment, one may as well think of lashing another into tender regard for him. Or, do you think, that the terrors of the coming vengeance will ever incline a human being to love the God who threatens him? Powerful

as these terrors are, in persuading man to turn from the evil of his ways,—they most assuredly do not form the artillery by which the heart of man can be carried. They draw not forth a single affection, but the affection of fear. They never can charm the human bosom into a feeling of attachment to God. And it goes to prove the necessity of some singular expedient, for restoring man to fellowship with his Maker, that the only obedience on which this fellowship can be perpetuated, is an obedience which no threatenings can force,—to which no warnings of displeasure can reclaim,—which all the solemn proclamations of law and justice cannot carry,—and all the terrors and severities of a sovereignty resting on power, as its only foundation, can never subdue. The utterance of the words. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, or perish everlastingly, can no more open the shut and alienated heart of man, than it can open a gate of iron. Multiply these arguments of terror as you may,—arm them with tenfold energy, and make them to fall in thunder on the sinner's ears,—tell him of the God of judgment, and manifest to him the frown of His angry countenance,—lay before him the grim aspect of his impending death, and spread a deeper mantle of despair over the vast field of that eternity which is on the other side of it;—you may disquiet him, and right that he should be so,—you may prevail on him to give up many evil doings, and right that the whole urgency of the coming wrath should be employed to make him give them up immediately,—you may set him a-trembling at the power of God, and better this than spending his

guilty career in thoughtlessness and unconcern about the great Lawgiver;—but where, in the midst of all this, shall we find obedience to the very first and greatest commandment of the law? Has this obedience been yet so much as entered on? Has love to God so much as reached the infancy of its existence, in that heart which is now beginning to be agitated by its terrors? Amid all the bitterness of remorse, and all the fearful looking for of judgment, and all the restless anxieties of conscious guilt, and anticipated vengeance, tell us, if a single particle of tenderness towards God, has any place in this restless and despairing bosom? Tell us, if it act as an element at all, in this wild war of turbulence and disorder? Or, has it yet begun to dawn upon the mind, and spread its salutary and composing charm over that dark scene of conflict, under which many a sinner has to sustain the burden of the wearisome nights that are appointed to him? You may seek for love to God throughout all the chambers of his heart, and seek in vain. The man may be acting such reformations as he is driven to; and may be clothing himself in such visible decencies, as he feels himself compelled to put on; and may be labouring away at the drudgery of such observances as he thinks will give him relief from the corrosions of that undying worm, which never ceases to goad him with its reproaches: but as to the love of God, there is as grim and determined an exclusion of this principle as ever,—that avenue to his heart has never been unlocked, through which it might be made to find its way,—every former argument, so far from having dissolved the barrier, has only served

to rivet and to make it more unmovable. And the difficulty still lies upon us,—how are we to deposit in the heart of man, the only right principle of obedience to God,—and to lead him onward in the single way of a pure, and spiritual, and substantial repentance?

This, then, is a case of difficulty; and, in the Bible, God is said to have lavished all the riches of His unsearchable wisdom on the business of managing it. No wonder that to His angels it appeared a mystery, and that they desired to look into it. It appears a matter of direct and obvious facility to intimidate man,—and to bring his body into a forced subordination to all the requirements. But the great matter was, how to attach man,—how to work in him a liking to God, and a relish for His character;—or, in other words, how to communicate to human obedience, that principle, without which, it is no obedience at all,—to make him serve God, because he loved Him; and to run in the way of all His commandments, because this was the thing in which he greatly delighted himself. To lay upon us the demand of satisfaction for His violated law, could not do it. To press home the claims of justice upon any sense of authority within us, could not do it. To bring forward, in threatening array, the terrors of His judgment, and of His power against us, could not do it. To unveil the glories of that throne where He sitteth in equity, and manifest to His guilty creatures the awful inflexibilities of His truth and righteousness, could not do it. To look out from the cloud of vengeance, and trouble

our darkened souls as He did those of the Egyptians of old, with the aspect of a menacing Deity, could not do it. To spread the field of an undone eternity before us; and tell us of those dreary abodes where each criminal hath his bed in hell, and the centuries of despair which pass over him are not counted, because there no seasons roll, and the unhappy victims of the tribulation, and the wrath, and the anguish, know, that for the mighty burden of the sufferings which weigh upon them, there is no end, and no mitigation—this prospect, appalling as it is, and coming home upon the belief, with all the characters of the most immutable certainty, could not do it. The affections of the inner man remain as unmoved as ever, under the successive and repeated influence of all these dreadful applications. There is not one of them, which, instead of conciliating, does not stir up a principle of resistance; and, subject any human creature to the treatment of them all, and to nothing else, and he may tremble at God, and shrink from the contemplation of God, and feel an overpowering awe at the thought of God, when that thought visits him; but we maintain, that not one particle of influence has been sent into his heart, to make him love God. Under such applications as these, we can conceive the creature, gathering a new energy from despair, and mustering up a stouter defiance than ever, to the God who threatens him. Strange contest between the thing formed and Him who formed it!—but we see it exhibited among the determined votaries of wickedness in life; and it is the very contest which

gives its moral aspect to hell throughout all eternity. There, God reigns in vindictive majesty; and there, every heart of every outcast, sheathed in impenetrable hardness, mutters its blasphemies against Him. O hideous and revolting spectacle! and how awful to think, that the unreclaimed sons of profligacy, who pour along our streets, and throng our markets, and form the fearful majority in almost every chamber of business, and in every workshop of industry, are thither speeding their infatuated way! What a wretched field of contemplation is around us, when we see on every side of it the mutual encouragement,—the ever-plying allurements,—the tacit, though effectual and well understood combination, sustaining, over the whole face of this alienated world, a firm and systematic rebellion against God! We are not offering an exaggerated picture when we say, that within reach of the walk of a single hour, there are thousands, and thousands more, who have cast away from them the authority of God; and who have been nerved by all His threatenings into a more determined attitude of wickedness; and who glory in their unprincipled dissipations; and who, without one sigh at the moving spectacle of ruined innocence, will, in the hearing of companions younger than themselves, scatter their pestilential levities around them, and care not though the hope of parents, and the yet unvitiated delicacy of youth, shall wither and expire under the contagion of their ruffian example; and will patronize every step of that progres which leads from one depravity to another, till their ill-fated proselyte, made as

much the child of hell as themselves, shall share in that common ruin, which, in the great day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, will come forth from the storehouse of His wrath, in one mighty torrent, on the heads of all who boast of their iniquity. We have now touched on the limits of a subject of which half its horrors are untold; but through which, the minister of the counsels of Heaven must clear his intrepid way, in spite of all its painfulness. We will not pursue it at present, but neither will we count the digression out of place, should a single parent among you be led, from what we have now uttered, to be jealous over his children with a godly jealousy, and not to suffer those, for whose eternity he is so deeply responsible, to take their random direction through society, just where the prospects of business, and of worldly advantage, may chance to carry them; to calculate on the possibilities of moral corruption, as well as on the possibilities of lucrative employment; to look well to exposures, and acquaintances, and hours of social entertainment, as well as to the common-place object of a situation in the world. And when you talk of a good line for your children, just think a little more of the line that leadeth to eternity; and have a care lest you be the instrument of putting them on such a path of danger, that it shall only be by the very rarest miracle of grace, that your helpless young can be kept from falling, or be renewed again into repentance.

But the difficulty in question still remains unresolved. How then is this regeneration to be wrought, if no threatenings can work it—if no terrors

of judgment can soften the heart into that love of God, which forms the chief feature of repentance —if all the direct applications of law and of righteous authority, and of its tremendous and immutable sanctions, so far from attaching man in tenderness to his God, have only the effect of impressing a violent recoil upon all his affections, and, by the hardening influence of despair, of stirring up in his bosom a more violent antipathy than ever? Will the high and solemn proclamations of a menacing Deity not do it? This is not the way in which the heart of man can be carried. He is so constituted, that the law of love can never, never, be established within him by the engine of terror; and here is the barrier to this regeneration on the part of man. But if a threat of justice cannot do it, will an act of forgiveness do it? This again is not the way in which God can admit the guilty to acceptance. He is so constituted, that His truth cannot be trampled upon; and His government, cannot be despoiled of its authority; and its sanctions cannot, with impunity, be defied; and every solemn utterance of the Deity cannot but find its accomplishment, in such a way as may vindicate His glory, and make the whole creation He has formed stand in awe of its Almighty Sovereign. And here is another barrier on the part of God; and that economy of redemption, in which a dead and undiscerning world see no skilfulness to admire, and no feature of graciousness to allure, was so planned, in the upper counsels of heaven, that it maketh known, to principalities and powers, the manifold wisdom of Him who devised it. The men

of this infidel generation, whose every faculty is so bedimmed by the grossness of sense, that they cannot lay hold of the realities of faith, and cannot appreciate them,—to them the barriers we have now insisted on, which lie in the way of man taking God into his love, and of God taking man into His acceptance, may appear to be so many faint and shadowy considerations, of which they feel not the significancy; but, to the pure and intellectual eye of angels, they are substantial obstacles, and One mighty to save had to travail in the greatness of His strength, in order to move them away. The Son of God descended from heaven, and He took upon Him the nature of man, and He suffered in his stead, and He consented that the whole burden of offended justice should fall upon Him, and He bore in His own body on the tree, the weight of all those accomplishments by which His Father behoved to be glorified; and after having magnified the law, and made it honourable, by pouring out His soul unto the death for us, He went up on high, and, by an arm of everlasting strength, levelled that wall of partition which lay across the path of acceptance: and thus it is, that the barrier on the part of God is done away, and He, with untarnished glory, can dispense forgiveness over the whole extent of a guilty creation, because He can be just, while He is the justifier of them who believe in Jesus.

And if the barrier, on the part of God, is thus moved aside, why not the barrier on the part of man? Does not the wisdom of redemption show itself here also? Does it not embrace some skilful

contrivance, by which it penetrates those mounds that beset the human heart, and ward the entrance of the principle of love away from it, and which all the direct applications of terror and authority, have only the effect of fixing more immovably upon their basis? Yes, it does—for it changes the aspect of the Deity towards man; and were man only to have faith in the announcements of the gospel, so as to see God with the eye of his mind under this new aspect—love to God would spring up in his heart, as the unfailing consequence. Let man see God as He sets Himself forth in this wonderful revelation, and let him believe the reality of what he sees, and he cannot but love the Being he is employed in contemplating. Without this gospel, he may see him to be a God of justice; but he cannot do this without seeing the frown of severity directed against himself, a wretched offender. With this gospel, he sees the full burden of violated justice borne away from him; and God stands before him unrobed of all His severities, and tenderly inviting him to draw near through that blood of atonement which was shed, the just for the unjust, to bring the sinner unto God. Without this gospel, he may see truth of God; but he sees it pledged to the fulfilment of the most awful threatenings against him: with this gospel, he sees the full weight of all these accomplishments, resting on the head of the great Sacrifice; and God's truth is now fully embarked on the most cheering assurances of pardon, on the most liberal invitations of good-will, on the most exceeding great and precious promises. Without this gospel, he may see

the government of God leaning on the pillars of that immutability which upholds it. But this very immutability is to him the sentence of despair; and how can he love that face, on which are stamped the characters of a stern and vindictive majesty? With this gospel, the face of God stands legibly revealed to him in other characters. That law which, resting on the solemn authority of its firm and unalterable requirements, demanded a fulfilment, up to the last jot and tittle of it, has been magnified, and has been made honourable, by one illustrious Sufferer, who put forth the greatness of His strength, in that dark hour of the travail of His soul, when He bore the burden of all its penalties. That wrath which should have been discharged on the guilty millions He died for, was all concentred upon Him, who took upon Himself the chastisement of our peace, and on that day of mysterious agony, drank, to the very dregs, the cup of our expiation. And God, who planned the whole work of this wonderful redemption—God, who in love to a guilty world sent His Son amongst us to accomplish it—God, who rather than lose His alienated creatures, as He could not strip His eternal throne of a single attribute that supported it, awoke the sword of vengeance against His Fellow, that on Him the truth and the justice of the Deity might receive their most illustrious vindication—God, who out of Christ, sits surrounded with all the darkness of unapproachable majesty,—is now God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, and not imputing unto them their trespasses. His tender mercy is now free to rejoice amid all the

glory of His other bright and untarnished perfections and He pours the expression of this tenderness with an unsparing hand, over the whole extent of His sinful creation; and He lets himself down to the language of a beseeching supplicant, praying that each and every one of us might be reconciled unto Him, and, putting on a winning countenance of invitation to the guiltiest of us all, He tells us, that if we only come to Him through the appointed Mediator, He will blot out, as with a thick cloud, our transgressions,—and that, as if carried away to a land that was not inhabited, He will make no more mention of them.

And thus it is, that the goodness of God destroyeth the enmity of the human heart. When every other argument fails, this, if perceived by the eye of faith, finds its powerful and persuasive way through every barrier of resistance. Try to approach the heart of man by the instruments of terror and of authority, and it will disdainfully repel you. There is not one of you, skilled in the management of human nature, who does not perceive, that, though this may be a way of working on the other principles of our constitution—of working on the fears of man, or in his sense of interest; this is not the way of gaining by a single hairbreadth on the attachments of his heart. Such a way may force, or it may terrify, but it never can endear; and after all the threatening array of such an influence as this is brought to bear upon man, there is not one particle of service it can extort from him, but what is all rendered in the spirit of a painful and reluctant bondage. Now, this is not the service which

prepares for heaven. This is not the service which assimilates men to angels. This is not the obedience of those glorified spirits, whose every affection harmonizes with their every performance; and the very essence of whose piety consists of delight in God, and the love they bear to Him. To bring up man to such an obedience as this, his heart behoved to be approached in a peculiar way; and no such way is to be found, but within the limits of the Christian revelation. There alone you see God, without injury to His other attributes, plying the heart of man with the irresistible argument of kindness. There alone do you see the great Lord of heaven and of earth, setting Himself forth to the most worthless and the most wandering of His children,—putting forth His own hand to the work of healing the breach which sin hath made between them,—telling him that His word could not be set aside, and His threatenings could not be mocked, and His justice could not be defied and trampled on, and that it was not possible for His perfections to receive the slightest taint in the eyes of the creation He had thrown around Him; but that all this was provided for, and not a single creature within the compass of the universe He had formed, could now say, that forgiveness to man was degrading to the authority of God; and that by the very act of atonement, which poured a glory over all the high attributes of His character, His mercy might now burst forth without limit, and without control, upon a guilty world, and the broad flag of invitation be unfurled in the sight of all its families.

Let the sinner, then, look to God through the

medium of such a revelation; and the sight which meets him there, may well tame the obstinacy of that heart, which had wrapped itself up in impenetrable hardness against the force of every other consideration. Now that the storm of the Almighty's wrath has been discharged upon Him who bore the burden of the world's atonement, He has turned His throne of glory into a throne of grace, and cleared away from the pavilion of His residence all the darkness which encompassed it. The God who dwelleth there, is God in Christ; and the voice He sends from it, to this dark and rebellious province of His mighty empire, is a voice of the most beseeching tenderness. Good-will to men is the announcement with which His messengers come fraught to a guilty world; and, since the moment in which it burst upon mortal ears from the peaceful canopy of heaven, may the ministers of salvation take it up, and go round with it among all the tribes and individuals of the species. Such is the real aspect of God towards you. He cannot bear that his alienated children should be finally and everlastingly away from Him. He feels for you all the longing of a parent bereaved of His offspring. To woo you back again unto Himself, He scatters among you the largest and the most liberal assurances; and with a tone of imploring tenderness, does He say to one and to all of you, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will you die?" He has no pleasure in your death. He does not wish to glorify Himself by the destruction of any one of you. "Look to me all ye ends of the earth, and be saved," is the wide and the generous announce-

ment, by which He would recall, from the very outermost limits of His sinful creation, the most worthless and polluted of those who have wandered away from Him. Now give us a man who perceives, with the eye of his mind, the reality of all this; and you give us a man in possession of the principle of faith. Give us a man in possession of this faith; and his heart, shielded, as it were, against the terrors of a menacing Deity, is softened and subdued, and resigns its every affection at the moving spectacle of a beseeching Deity: and thus it is that faith manifests the attribute which the Bible assigns to it, of working by love. Give us a man in possession of this love; and, animated as he is with the living principle of that obedience, where the willing and delighted consent of the inner man, goes along with the performance of the outer man his love manifests the attribute which the Bible assigns to it, when it says, "This is the love of God, that ye keep his commandments." And thus it is, amid the fruitlessness of every other expedient, when power threatened to crush the heart which it could not soften,—when authority lifted its voice, and laid on man an enactment of love which it could not carry,—when terror shot its arrows, and they dropped ineffectual from that citadel of the human affections, which stood proof against the impression of every one of them,—when wrath mustered up its appalling severities, and filled that bosom with despair which it could not fill with the warmth of a confiding attachment,—then the kindness of an inviting God was brought to bear on the heart of man, and got an opening

through all its mysterious avenues. Goodness did what the nakedness of power could not do. It found its way through all the intricacies of the human constitution; and there, depositing the right principle of repentance, did it establish the alone effectual security for the right purposes and the right fruits of repentance.

SERMON V.

THE UNION OF TRUTH AND MERCY IN THE GOSPEL.

"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."—PSALM lxxxv. 10.

It was not by a simple deed of amnesty, that man was invited to return and be at peace with God. It was by a deed of expiation. It was not by nullifying the sanctions of the law, that man was offered a free and a full discharge from the penalties he had incurred by breaking it. It was by executing these sanctions on another, who voluntarily took them upon himself; and who, in so doing, magnified the law, and made it honourable. To redeem us from the curse of the law, Christ became a curse for us. It was not by God lifting off our iniquities from our persons, and scattering them away into a region of forgetfulness, without one demonstration of His abhorrence, and without the fulfilment of His threatenings against them; but lifting them off from us, He laid them on another, who bare, in His own person, the punishment that we should have borne. God laid upon His own Son the iniquities of us all. The guilt of our sins is not done away by a mere act of forgiveness. It is washed away by the blood of the Lamb. God set Him forth a propitiation. He was smitten

for our transgressions. He gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God. The system of the gospel no more expunges the attribute of mercy from the character of the Godhead, than it expunges the attributes of truth and righteousness. But all the mercy which it offers and proclaims to a guilty world, is the mercy which flows upon it through the channel of that Mediatorship, by which His truth and His justice have been asserted and vindicated; and, while it reveals to us the openness of this channel, it also reveals to us that every other which the heart of man may conceive, is shut, and intercepted, and utterly impassable. There is none other name given under heaven, whereby man can be saved, but the name of Him who poured out his soul unto the death for us. Without the shedding of His blood, there could have been no remission. And he who hath not the Son, hath the wrath of God abiding on him.

It is due to our want of moral sensibility, that sin looks so light and so trivial in our estimation. We have no adequate feeling of its malignity, and of its exceeding sinfulness. And, liable as we are to think of God, that He is altogether like unto ourselves, do we think that He may cancel our guilt as easily from the book of His condemnation, by an act of forgiveness—as we cancel it from our own memory, by an act of forgetfulness. But God takes His own way, and most steadfastly asserts, throughout the whole process of our recovery, the prerogatives of His own truth, and His own righteousness. He so loved the world, as to send His Son to it, not to condemn, but to save. But He

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will not save us in such a way as to confirm our light estimation of sin, or to let down the worth and the dignity of His own character. The method of our salvation is not left to the random caprices of human thought and human fancy. It is a method devised for us by unsearchable wisdom, and made known to us by fixed and unalterable truth, and prescribed to us by a supreme authority, which has debarred every other method; and though we may behold no one feature, either of greatness or of beauty, to admire in it—yet do angels admire it; and to accomplish it, did the Son of God move from the residence of His glory; and all heaven appears to have laboured with the magnitude and the mystery of the great undertaking; and along the whole tract of revelation, from the first age of the world, do we behold the notices of the coming atonement; and while man sits at his ease, and can see nothing to move him either to gratitude or to wonder, in the evolution of that mighty scheme, by which mercy and truth have been made to meet together, and righteousness and peace to kiss each other,—it is striking to mark the place and the prominency which are given to it, in the counsels of the Eternal. And it might serve to put us right, and to rebuke the levities which are so currently afloat in this dead and darkened world, did we only look at the stress that is laid on this great work, throughout the whole of its preparation and its performance,—and how to bring it to its accomplishment, the Father had to send the Son into the world,—and to throw a veil over His glory,—and to put the cup of our chastisement into His hand,—and to bid the

sword of righteous vengeance awake against His Fellow,—and that He might clear a way of access to a guilty world, had to do it through the blood of an everlasting covenant,—and to lay the full burden of our atonement on the head of the innocent sufferer,—and to endure the spectacle of His bitterness and His agonies, and His tears, till He cried out that it was finished, and so bowed Himself and gave up the ghost.

Man is blind to the necessity, but God sees it. The prayer of Christ in His agony was, that the cup, if possible, might be removed from Him. But it was not possible. He could have called twelve legions of angels, and they would have eagerly flown to rescue their beloved Lord from the hands of His persecutors. But He knew that the Scripture must be fulfilled, and they looked on in silent forbearance. It behoved Him to undergo all this. And there was a need, and a propriety, why He should suffer all these things, ere He entered into His glory.

This text suggests two remarks on the method of our redemption. First, It maintains the entireness and glory of all the attributes of the Godhead. Secondly, It provides a solid foundation, for the peace of every sinner who concurs in it.

I. In darkness, as we are, about the glory and character of the Supreme Being, it would offer a violence even to our habitual conceptions of Him, to admit of any limit, or any deduction from the excellencies of His nature. We should even think

it a lessening of the Deity, were the extent of His perfections such, as that we should be able to grasp them within the comprehension of our understandings. The property of chiefest admiration to His creatures is, that they know but a part, and are not aware how small a part that is, to what is unknown; and never is their obeisance more lowly, than when, under the sense of a greatness that is undefined and unsearchable, they feel themselves baffled by the infinitude of the Creator. It is not His power as attested by all that exists within the limits of actual discovery; but His power, as conceived to form and uphold a universe, whose outskirts are unknown. It is not His wisdom, as exhibited in what has been seen by human eye; but His wisdom, as pervading the unnumbered secrecies of a mechanism, which no eye can penetrate. It is not His knowledge, as displayed in the greater and prophetic outlines of the history of this world; but His knowledge, as embracing all the mazes of creation, and all the mighty periods of eternity. It is not His antiquity, as prior to all that is visible, and as reaching far above and beyond the remote infancy of nature; but His antiquity, as retiring upwards from the loftiest ascent of our imaginations, and lost in the viewless depths of an existence, that was from everlasting.—These are what serve to throne the Deity in grandeur inaccessible. It is the thought of what eye hath not seen, and ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, that places Him on such a height of mystery before us. And should we ever be able to overtake, in thought, the dimensions of any

attribute that belongs to Him,—and far more, should we ever be able to outstrip, in fancy, a single feature of that character which is realized by the living and reigning God—should defect or impotency attach to Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto,—Would we feel as if all our most rooted and accustomed conceptions of the Godhead had sustained an overthrow; would we feel as if the sanctuary of Him who is the King eternal and invisible, had suffered violence.

And this is just as true of the moral as of the natural attributes of the Godhead. When we think of His truth, it is a truth which, if heaven and earth stand committed to the fulfilment of its minutest article, heaven and earth must, for its vindication, pass away. When we think of His holiness, it is such that, if sin offer to draw nigh, a devouring fire goeth forth to burn up and to destroy it. When we think of His law, it is a law which must be made honourable, even though, by the enforcement of its sanctions, it shall sweep into an abyss of misery all the generations of the rebellious. And yet this God, just, and righteous, and true, is a God of love, and of compassion, infinite. He is slow to anger, and of great mercy. He does not afflict willingly; and as a father rejoices over His children, does He long to rejoice in tenderness over us all; and out of the storehouse of a grace that is inexhaustible, does He deal out the offers of pardon and reconciliation to every one of us. Even in some way or other does the love of God for His creatures find its way through the barrier of their sinfulness; and He who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,

—He who hath spoken the word, and shall He not perform it?—He of whose law it has been said, that not one jot, or one tittle of it, shall pass away, till all be fulfilled—He holds out the overtures of friendship to the children of disobedience; and invites the guiltiest among them to the light of His countenance, in time, and to the enjoyment of His glory and presence, in eternity.

There is no one device separate from the gospel, by which the glory of any one of these attributes can be exalted, but by the surrender or the limitation of another attribute. It is in the gospel alone that we perceive how each of them may be heightened to infinity, and yet each of them reflect a lustre on the rest. When Christ died, justice was magnified. When He bore the burden of our atonement, the truth of God received its vindication. When the sins of the world brought Him to the cross, the lesson taught by this impressive spectacle was, Holiness unto the Lord. All the severer perfections of the Godhead were, in fact, more powerfully illustrated by the deep and solemn propitiation that was made for sin, than they could have been by the direct punishment of sin itself,—yet all redounding to the triumph of His mercy. For mercy, in the exercise of a simple and spontaneous tenderness, does not make so high an exhibition, as mercy forcing its way through restraints and difficulties,—as mercy accomplishing its purposes by a plan of unsearchable wisdom,—as mercy surrendering what was most dear, for the attainment of its object,—as the mercy of God, not simply loving the world, but so loving it as to send

His only beloved Son, and to lay upon Him the iniquities of us all,—as mercy, thus surmounting a barrier, which, to created eye, appeared immoveable, and which both pours a glory on the other excellencies of the Godhead, and rejoices over them.

It is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which has poured the light of day into all the intricacies of this contemplation. We there see no compromise, and no surrender, of the attributes to each other. We see no mutual encroachment on their respective provinces,—no letting down of that entire and absolute perfection which belongs to every part in the character of the Godhead. The justice of God has not been invaded; for, by Him who poured out his soul unto the death for us, has the whole weight of this aggrieved and offended attribute been borne; and from that cross of agony, where He cried out that it was finished, does the Divine justice send forth a brighter and a nobler radiance of vindicated majesty, than if the minister of vengeance had gone forth, and wreaked the whole sentence of condemnation on every son and daughter of the species. And as the justice of God has suffered no encroachment, so, such is the admirable skilfulness of this expedient, that the mercy of God is restrained by no limitation. It is arrested in its offers by no question about the shades, and the degrees, and the varieties of sinfulness. It stops at no point in the descending scale of human depravity. The blood of Christ, cleansing from all sin, has spread such a field for its invitations, that, in the full confidence of a

warranted and universal commission, may the messengers of grace walk over the face of the world, and lay the free gift of acceptance at the door of every individual, and of every family. Such is the height, and depth, and breadth, and length, of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus; and yet it is a mercy so exercised, as to keep the whole counsel and character of God unbroken,—and a mercy, from the display of which, there beams a brighter radiance than ever from each lineament in the image of the Godhead.

Now, if the glory of God be so involved in this way of redemption, what shall we think of the disparagement that is rendered to Him, and to all His attributes, by the man who, without respect to the work and the righteousness of Christ, seeks to be justified by his own righteousness? It is quite possible for man to toil and to waste his strength on the object of his salvation, and yet, by all he can make out, may be only widening his laborious deviation from the path which leads to it. Do his uttermost to establish a righteousness of his own, and what is the whole fruit of his exertion? —the mere semblance of righteousness, without the infusion of its essential quality,—labour without love,—the drudgery of the hand, without the desire and devotedness of the heart, as its inspiring principle. If the man be dissatisfied, as he certainly ought to be, then a sense of unexpiated guilt will ever and anon intrude itself upon his fears; and a resistless conviction of the insufficiency of all his performances, will never cease to haunt and to paralyze him. In these circumstances,

there may be the conformity of the letter extorted from him, in the spirit of bondage; but the animating soul is not there, which turns obedience into a service of delight, and a service of affection. In Heaven's account, such obedience as this is but the mockery of a lifeless skeleton; and, even as a skeleton, it is both wanting in its parts, and unshapely in its proportions. It is an obedience defective, even in the tale and measure of its external duties. But what pervades the whole of it by the element of worthlessness is, that, destitute of love to God, it is utterly destitute of a celestial character, and can never prepare an inhabitant of this world for the joys or the services of the great celestial family.

And, on the other hand, if the man be satisfied, this very circumstance gives to the righteousness that he would establish for himself, the character of an insult upon God, instead of a reverential offering. It is a righteousness accompanied with a certain measure of confident feeling, that it is good enough for the acceptance of the Lawgiver. There is in it the audacity of a claim and a challenge upon His approbation. Short as it is, in respect of outward performance, and tainted within by the very spirit of earthliness, it is brought like a lame and diseased victim in sacrifice, and laid upon the altar before Him. It is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against God; but it is a still more direct outrage upon His attributes, to expect that He will look on sinfulness with complacency. It is an open defiance to the law, to trample upon its requirements; but it were a still deadlier overthrow

of its authority, to reverse its sanctions, and make it turn its threatenings into rewards. The sinner who disobeys and trembles, renders at least the homage of his fears to the truth and power of the Eternal. But the sinner who makes a righteousness of his infirmities, and puts a gloss upon his disobedience, and brings the accursed thing to the gate of the sanctuary, and bids the piercing eye of Omniscience look upon it, and be satisfied,—tell us whether the fire which cometh forth will burn up the offering, that it may rise in sweetly smelling savour to Him who sitteth on the throne; or will it seize on the presumptuous offerer, who could thus dare the inspection, and thrust his unprepared footstep within the precincts, of unspotted holiness.

And how must it go to aggravate the offence of such an approach, when it is made in the face of another righteousness, which God Himself hath provided, and in which alone He hath proclaimed, that it is safe for a sinner to draw nigh! When the alternative is fairly proposed, to come on the merit of your own obedience, and be tried by it, or to come on the merit of the obedience of Christ, and receive in your own person the reward which He hath purchased for you,—only think of the aspect it must bear in the eye of Heaven, when the offer of the perfect righteousness is contemptuously set aside, and the sinner chooses to appear in his own character before the presence of the Eternal. When the imputation of vanity and uselessness is thus fastened on all that the Son hath done, and on all that the Father hath devised,

for the redemption of the guilty,—when that righteousness, to accomplish which, Christ had to travail in the greatness of His strength, is thus held to be nothing, by creatures whose every thought, and every performance, have the stain of corruption in them,—when that doctrine of His death, on which in the book of God's counsel is made to turn the deliverance of our world, is counted to be foolishness,—when the sinner thus persists in obtruding his own virtue on the notice of the Lawgiver, and refuses to put on as a covering of defence, the virtue of his Saviour,—We have only to contrast the lean shrivelled paltry dimensions of the one, with the faultless and sustained and God-like perfections of the other—to perceive how desperate is the folly, and how unescapeable is the doom, of him who hath neglected the great salvation.

It is thus that the refusal of Christ, as our righteousness, stamps a deeper and more atrocious character of rebellion on the guilty than before,—and it is thus that the word of His mouth, like a two-edged sword, performs one function on him who accepts, and an opposite function on him who despises it. If the gospel be not the savour of life unto life, it will be the savour of death unto death. If it be not a rock of confidence, it will be a rock of offence; and it will fall upon him who resists it, and grind him into powder. If we kiss not the Son, in the day of our peace, the day of His wrath is coming; and who shall be able to stand when His anger is kindled but a little? We have already offended God, by the sinfulness of our practice,—we may

yet offend Him still more, by the haughtiness of our pretensions. The evil of our best works constitutes them an abomination in His sight; but nothing remains to avert the hostility of His truth and His holiness against us, if by those works we seek to be justified. It will indeed be the sealing up of our iniquity, if our obedience, impregnated as it is with the very spirit of that iniquity, shall be set up in rivalship to the obedience of His only and well-beloved Son—if, by viewing the defect of our righteousness as a thing of indifference, and the fulness of His as a thing of no value, we shall heap insult upon transgression—and if, after the provocation of a broken law, we shall maintain the boastful attitude of him who hath won the merit and the reward of victory; and in this attitude add the farther provocation of a slighted and rejected gospel.

II. We shall conclude, for the present, these brief and imperfect remarks, by adverting to the solidity of that foundation of peace, which the gospel scheme of mercy provides for every sinner who concurs in it. It is altogether worthy of observation, how, under this exquisite contrivance, the very elements of disquietude, in a sinner's bosom, are turned into the elements of comfort and confidence, in the mind of a believer. It is the unswerving truth of God, which haunts the former by the thought of the certainty of His coming vengeance. But this very truth, committed to the fulfilment of all those promises, which are yea and amen in Christ Jesus, sustains the latter by the thought of the certainty of His coming salvation. It is justice,

unbending justice, which sets such a seal on the condemnation of the disobedient, that every sinner, who is out of Christ, feels it to be irrevocable. In Christ, this attribute, instead of a terror, becomes a security; for it is just in God to justify him who believes in Jesus. It is the sense of God's violated authority, which fills the heart of an awakened sinner with the fear that he is undone. But this authority, under the gospel proclamation, is leagued on the side of comfort, and not of fear; for this is the commandment of God, that we believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, as He has given us commandment. It is not by an act of mercy, triumphing over the other attributes, that pardon is extended to the sinful; for, under the economy of the gospel, these attributes are all engaged on the side of mercy; and God is not only merciful, but He is faithful and just in forgiving the sins of those who accept of Christ, as He is offered to them in the gospel. Those very perfections, then, which fix and necessitate the doom of the rebellious, form into a canopy of defence around the head of the believer. The guarantees of a sinner's punishment now become the guarantees of promise; and while, like the flaming sword at the gate of paradise, they turn every way, and shut him out of every access to the Deity but one—let him take to that one, and they instantly become to him the sureties and the safeguard of that hiding-place into which he has entered.

The foundation, then, of a believer's peace, is, in every way, as sure and as solid as is the foundation of a sinner's fears. The very truth which

makes the one tremble, because staked to the execution of an unfulfilled threat, ministers to the other the strongest consolation. It is impossible for God to lie, says an awakened sinner, and this thought pursues him with the agony of an arrow sticking fast. It is impossible for God to lie, says a believer; and as He hath not only said but sworn, there are two immutable things by which to anchor the confidence of him who hath fled for refuge to the hope set before him. He staggers not at the promises of God, because of unbelief. He holds himself steadfast, by simply counting Him to be faithful who hath promised. It is through that very faith, by being strong in which he gives glory to God, that he gains peace to his own heart; and the justice which beams a terror on all who stand without, utterly passes by the shielded head of him, who hath turned to the strong hold, and taken a place under the shadow of His wings, who hath satisfied the justice of God, and taken upon himself the burden of its fullest vindication.

SERMON VI.

THE PURIFYING INFLUENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

"Sanctified by faith."—Acts xxvi. 18.

It is a matter of direct and obvious understanding, how the law, by its promises and its threatenings, should exert an influence over human conduct. We seem to walk in a plain path, when we pass onwards from the enforcements of the law, to the effect of them on the fears, and the hopes, and the purposes of man. Do this, and you shall live; and do the opposite of this, and you shall forfeit life—form two clear and distinct processes, in the conceiving of which there is no difficulty whatever. The motive and the movement both stand intelligibly out to the discernment of common sense; nor in the application of such argument as this, to the design of operating on the character or life of a human being, is there any mystery to embarrass—any hidden step, which, by baffling our every attempt to seize upon it, leaves us in a state of helpless perplexity.

The same is not true of the gospel, or of the manner in which it operates on the springs of human action. It is not so readily seen, how its privileges can be appropriated by faith, and at the same time its precepts can retain their practical authority over

the conduct of a believer. There is an alarm, and an honest alarm, on the part of many, lest a proclamation of free grace unto the world, should undermine all our securities for the cause of righteousness in the world. They look with jealousy upon the freeness. They fear lest a deed so ample and unconditional, of forgiveness for the past, should give rise, in the heart of a sinner, to a secure opinion of his impunity for the future. What they dread is, that to proclaim such a freeness of pardon on the part of God, would be to proclaim a corresponding freeness of practice on the part of man. They are able to comprehend how the law, by its direct enforcements, should operate in keeping men from sin; but they are not able to comprehend how, when not under the law, but under grace, there should continue the same motives to abstain from sin, as those intelligible ones which the law furnishes, or even other motives, of more powerful operation. We are quite sure, that there is something here which needs to be made plain to the understandings of a very numerous class of inquirers,—a knot of difficulty which needs to be untied,—a hidden step in the process of explanation, on which they may firmly pass from what is known to what is unknown. There are not two terms, in the whole compass of human language, which stand more frequently and more familiarly contrasted with each other, than those of faith and good works; and this, not merely on the question of our acceptance before God, but also on the question of the personal character and acquirements of a true disciple of Christ. It is positively

not seen, how the possession of the one should at all stimulate to the performance of the other,—how the peace of the gospel should reside in the same heart, from which there emanates, on the life of a believer, the practice of the gospel,—how a righteousness that is without the deeds of the law, should stand connected, in the actual history of him who obtains it, with a zealous, and diligent, and every-day doing of these deeds. There is much in all this, to puzzle the man who is experimentally a stranger to the truth as it is in Jesus. Nor does it at all serve to extricate or to enlighten him, when he is made to perceive, that, in point of fact, those men who most cordially assent to the doctrine of salvation being all of grace, and not of works, are most assiduous in so walking, and in so working, and in so pains-taking, as if salvation were all of works, and not of grace. The fact is quite obvious and unquestionable. But the principle on which it rests, remains a mystery to the general eye of the world. They marvel, but they go no farther. They see that thus it is, but they see not how it is; and they put it down among those inexplicable oddities which do at times occur, both in the moral and natural kingdoms of the creation.

But in all our attempts to dissipate this obscurity, it is well to advert to the total difference between him who has the faith, and him who has it not. The one has the materials of the argument under his eye, and within the grasp of his handling. The other may be able to recognise in the argument a logical and consistent process; but he is at a loss

about the simple conceptions, which form the materials of the argument. He is like a man who can perform all the manipulations of an algebraical process, while he feels not the force or the significancy of the symbols. His habits of ratiocination enable him to perceive, that there is a connection between the ideas in the argument. But the ideas themselves are not manifest to him. It is not in the power of reasoning to supply this want. Reasoning cannot create the primary materials of the argument. It only cements them together. And here it is, that you are met by the impotency of human demonstration,—and are reduced to the attitude of knocking at a door which you cannot open,—and feel your need of an enlightening spirit,—and are made to perceive, that it is only on the threshold of Christianity, where you can hold the intercourse of a common sympathy and understanding with the world,—and that, to be admitted to the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, you must pass into a region of manifestation, where the world cannot follow, but where it will cast the imputation of madness and of mysticism after you.

Without attempting to define faith, as to the nature of it, which could not be done but with other words more simple than itself, let us look to the objects of faith, and see whether there do not emanate from them, a sanctifying influence on the heart of every real believer.

First, then, the whole object of faith, is the matter of the testimony of God in Scripture. So that though faith be a single principle, and is designated in language by a single term,—yet this

by no means precludes it from being such a principle, as comes into contact, and is conversant with a very great variety of objects. In this respect it may bear a resemblance to sight, or hearing, or any other of the senses, by which man holds communication with the external things that are near him, and around him. The same eye, which, when open, looks to a friend, and can, from that very look, afford entrance into the heart for an emotion of tenderness, will also behold other visible things, and take in an appropriate influence from each of them,—will behold the prospect of beauty that is before it, and thence obtain gratification to the taste,—or will behold the sportive felicity of animals, and thence obtain gratification to the benevolence,—or will behold the precipice beneath, and thence obtain a warning of danger, or a direction of safety,—or may behold a thousand different objects, and obtain a thousand different feelings and different intimations.

Now the same of faith. It has been called the eye of the mind. But whether this be a well-conceived image or not, it certainly affords an inlet to the mind for a great variety of communications. The apostle calls faith "the evidence of things not seen,"—not of one such thing, but of very many such things. The man who possesses faith, can be no more intellectually blind to one of these things, and at the same time knowing and believing as to another of them, than the man who possesses sight can, with his eye open, perceive one external object, and have no perception of another, which stands as nearly and as conspicuously before him.

The man who is destitute of sight, will never know what it is to feel the charm of visible scenery. But grant him sight; and he will not only be made alive to this charm, but to a multitude of other influences, all emanating from the various objects of visible nature, through the eye upon the mind, and against which his blindness had before opposed a hopeless and invincible barrier. And the man who is destitute of faith, will never know what it is to feel the charm of the peace-speaking blood of Christ. But grant him faith; and he will not only be made alive to this charm, but to a multitude of other influences, all emanating from the various truths of revelation, through this intellectual organ, on the heart of him who was at one time blind, but has now been made to see. This will help, in some measure, to clear up the perplexity to which we have just now adverted. They who are under its darkening influence, conceive of the faith which worketh peace, that it has only to do with one doctrine, and that that one doctrine relates to Christ, as a peace-offering for sin. Now, it is very true that it has to do with this one doctrine; but it has also to do with other doctrines, all equally presented before it in the very same record, and the view of all which is equally to be had, from the very same quarter of contemplation. In other words, the very same opening of the mental eye, through which the peace of the gospel finds entrance into the bosom of a faithful man, affords an entrance for the righteousness of the gospel along with it. The truth that Christ died for the sins of the world, will cast upon his mind its appropriate influence. But so also will the

truth, that Christ is to judge the world; and the truth, that unless ye repent ye shall perish; and the truth, that they who have a right to the tree of life, are they who keep the commandments; and the truth, that an unrighteous man shall not inherit the kingdom of God. If a man see not every one object that is placed within the sphere of his natural vision, he sees none of them, and his whole body is full of darkness. If a man believe the Bible to be the word of God, he will read it; but if he read it, and believe not every one truth that lies within the grasp of his understanding, he believes none of them, and is in darkness, and knoweth not whither he is going.

If I open the door of my mind to the word of God, I as effectually make it the repository of various truths, as, if I open the door of my chamber, and take in the Bible, I make this chamber the repository of the book, and of every chapter, and of every verse, that is contained in it. I thus bring my mind into contact with every one influence, that every one truth is fitted to exercise over it. If there be nothing in these truths contradictory to each other, (and if there be, let this set aside, as it ought, the authority of the whole communication,) then the mind acts a right and consistent part in believing each of them, and in submitting itself to the influence of each of them. And thus it is, that believing the propitiation which is through the blood of Christ, for the remission of sins that are past, I may feel through Him the peace of reconciliation with the Father; and believing that he who cometh unto Christ for forgiveness must for-

sake all, I may also feel the necessity which lies upon me of departing from all iniquity; and believing that in myself there is no strength, for the accomplishment of such a task, I may look around for other expedients, than such as can be devised by my own natural wisdom, or carried into effect by my own natural energies; and believing that, in the hand of Christ, there are gifts for the rebellious, and that one of these gifts is the Holy Spirit to strengthen His disciples, I may look to Him for my sanctification, even as I look unto Him for my redemption; and believing that the gift is truly promised as an answer to prayer, I may mingle a habit of prayer, with a habit of watchfulness and of endeavour. And thus may I go abroad over the whole territory of divine truth; and turn to its legitimate account every separate portion of it; and be in all a trusting, and a working, and a praying, and a rejoicing, and a trembling disciple —and that, not because I have given myself up to the guidance of clashing and contradictory principles —but because, with a faith commensurate to the testimony of God, I give myself over in my whole mind, and whole person, to the authority of a whole Bible.

But, secondly, let us take what some may think a more restricted view of the object of faith, and suppose it to be Jesus Christ in His person and in His character. It is a summary, but, at the same time, a most true and substantial affirmation, that we are saved by faith in Christ. And yet this very affirmation, true as it is, may have been so misunderstood as to darken the minds of many,

into the very misconception that we are attempting to expose. I could not be said to have faith in an acquaintance, if I believed not all that he told me. Nor have I faith in Christ, if I believe not every item of that communication of which He is the author, either by Himself or by His messengers. So that faith in Christ, so far from excluding any of the truths of the Bible, comprehends our assent to them all. But we are willing to admit, that the phrase is calculated to fasten our attention more particularly on such truth as relates, in a more immediate manner, to the person and the doings of the Saviour. Take it in this sense, and you will find that, though eminently and directly fitted to work peace in the heart of a believer, it is just as directly and as powerfully on the side of his practical righteousness. When I think of Christ, and think of Him as one who has poured out His soul unto the death for me, I feel a confidence in drawing near unto God. When employed in this contemplation, I look to Him as a crucified Saviour. But without keeping mine eye for a single moment from off His person—without another exercise of mind, than that by which I look unto Jesus, simply and entirely, as He is set forth unto me,—I also behold Him at one time as an exalted Saviour, and at another time as a commanding Saviour, and at another time as a strengthening Saviour. In other words, by the mere work of faith in Christ, I bring my heart into contact with all those motives, and all those elements of influence, which give rise to the new obedience of the gospel. When the veil betwixt me and the Saviour is with-

drawn,—when God shines in my heart with the light of the knowledge of His own glory in the face of His Son,—when the Spirit taketh of the things of Christ, and showeth them unto me, and I am asked, which of the things it is that is most fitted to arrest a convicted sinner, in the midst of his cries and prayers for deliverance,—I would say, that it was Christ lifted up on the cross for his offences, and pouring out the blood of that mighty expiation, by which the guilt of them all is washed away. This is the rock on which He will build all his hopes of acceptance before God. He will look unto Christ, and be at peace. But this is not the only attitude in which Christ is revealed to him. He will look to Christ as an example. He will look to Him as a Teacher. He will look to Him in all the capacities which are attached to the person, or identified with the doings, of the Saviour. He will look to Him, asserting His right of authority and disposal over those whom He has purchased unto Himself. He will, by the eye of faith, see that rebuking glance which our Saviour cast over the misconduct of His disciples,—and which, when Peter saw, by the eye of sight, he was so moved by the spectacle, that he went out and wept bitterly. That meekness and gentleness of Christ, in the name of which Paul besought his disciples to walk no more after the flesh, will be present in its influence on those who, though they see Him not, yet believe Him, and have their conceptions filled and satisfied with His likeness. They will behold Him to be an exalted Prince, as well as an exalted Saviour,—and

they will count it a faithful saying, that He came to sanctify as well as redeem,—and they will look upwards to His present might as a Commander, as well as forwards to His future majesty as a Judge,—and they will be thoroughly persuaded, that to persevere in sin, is altogether to thwart the great aim of the enterprise of our redemption,—and they will understand, as Paul did, who affirmed, with expostulations and tears, that the enemies of righteousness are also the enemies of the cross;—and thus, from Christ, in all His various attitudes, will a moralizing power descend on the hearts of those who really believe in Him,—and as surely as any man possesses the faith that is in Christ Jesus, so surely will he be sanctified by that faith.

And, thirdly, let us confine our attention still farther, to one particular article of our faith. Paul was determined to know nothing, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Now, conceive faith to attach itself to the latter clause of this verse, and that Christ crucified, for the time being, is the single object of its contemplation. There is still no such thing as a true faith, attaching itself to this one object exclusively; and though at one time it may be the sole contemplation which engrosses it, at other times it may have other contemplations. If, in fact, it shut out those other contemplations, which are furnished by the subject-matter of the testimony of God, it may be proved now, and it will be proved in the day of reckoning, to be no faith at all. But just as it has been said, that the mind can only think of one thing at a time, so faith may be employed, for a time, in looking only towards one object; and as

we said before, let Christ crucified be conceived to be that one object. From what has been said already, it will be seen, that this one exercise of faith will not counteract the legitimate effect of the other exercises. But we should like to compute the influence of this one exercise on the heart and life of a believer. In the case of an Antinomian, the doctrine of the atonement may furnish a pretext and a pacification to his conscience, under a wilful habit of perseverance in iniquity. But, if this partial faith of his be not a real faith, then we are not responsible for his conduct; nor ought he to be at all quoted as an exception against that alliance, for which we are contending, between the faith of the gospel and the cause of practical righteousness. Only grant the faith to be real; and, as there is no one doctrine of the Bible out of which it may not gather a purifying influence to the heart, so out of this doctrine of the atonement, will such a purifying influence descend most abundantly on the heart of every genuine believer.

For, it first takes away a wall of partition, which, in the case of every man who has not received this doctrine, lies across the path of his obedience at the very commencement. So long as I think that it is quite impossible for me so to run as to obtain, I will not move a single footstep. Under the burden of a hopeless controversy between me and God, I feel as it were weighed down to the inactivity of despair. I live without hope; and so long as I do so, I live without God in the world. And besides, He, while the object of my terror, is also the object of my aversion. The helpless necessity

under which I labour, so long as the question of my guilt remains unsettled, is to dread the Being whom I am commanded to love. I may occasionally cast a feeble regard towards that distant and inaccessible Lawgiver; but so long as I view Him shrouded in the darkness of frowning majesty, I can place in Him no trust, and I can bear towards Him no filial tenderness. I may occasionally consult the requirements of His law: but when I look to the uncancelled sentence that is against me, I can never tread, with hopeful or assured footsteps, on the career of obedience. But let me look unto Christ lifted up for our offences; and see the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, and which was contrary unto us, nailed to His cross, and there blotted out, and taken out of the way—and then I see the barrier in question levelled with the ground. I now behold the way of repentance cleared of the obstructions, by which it was aforetime rendered utterly impassable. This is the will of God, even your sanctification, may be sounded a thousand times in the ear of an unbeliever, and leave him as immoveable as it found him; because, while under a sense of unexpiated guilt, he sees a mighty parapet before him, which he cannot scale. But if the same words be sounded in the ears of a believer, they will put him into motion. For to him the parapet is opened up, and the rough way is made smooth, and the mountain and the hill are brought low, and the valley of separation is filled, and he is made to see the salvation of God. The path of obedience is made level before him, and he enters it with the inspiration of a new and invigorating

principle; and that love to God, which the consciousness of guilt will ever keep at a distance from the heart, now takes up the room of this terrifying, and paralyzing, and alienating sentiment; and the reception of this doctrine of atonement is just as much the turning point of a new character, as it is the turning point of a new hope; and it is the very point, in the history of every human soul, at which the alacrity of gospel obedience takes its commencement, as well as the cheerfulness of gospel anticipations. Till this doctrine be believed, there is no attempt at obedience at all; or else, it is such an obedience as is totally unanimated by the life and the love of real godliness. And it is not till this doctrine has taken possession of the mind, that any man can take up the language of the Psalmist, and say, "Lord, I am thy servant, I am thy servant, thou hast loosed my bonds."

Conceive then, a believer, with the career of obedience thus opened up and made hopeful to him,—conceive him with the necessity of obedience made just as authentically known to him, as are the tidings of his deliverance from guilt,—conceive a man who, by the act of rendering homage to the truth of God, rests a confidence in the death of Christ for pardon, and who also, by the very same act, subscribes to the sayings of Christ about repentance, and the new walk of the new creature,—and then let me ask you to think of the securities which encompass his mind, and protect it from the delusion that we have already alluded to. We have said, that the place which is felt in a vague apprehension of God's mercy, and which makes no

account of His truth, or of His justice, has the effect of making him who entertains it altogether stationary, in point of acquirement. With the semblance of good that he has about him, he will meet the sterner attributes of the Deity. For his defect of real good, he will draw on the indulgent attributes of the Deity. He will make the character of God suit itself to his own character, so that any stimulus to advance or to perfect it, shall be practically done away. And thus it is, that along the whole range of human accomplishment, you may observe an unvaried state of repose,—the repose, in fact, of death,—because the repose of men who, brought to the estimate of a spiritual law, will be found, to use the significant language of the Bible, "dead in trespasses and sins,"—sinning at one time without remorse, trusting at another time without foundation.

Now the gospel scheme of mercy is clear of this abuse altogether. It comes forth upon the sinner with an antidote against this security, just as strong and as prominent as is its antidote against despair. Insomuch that the state of the believer, in respect of motive and of practical influence, is the very reverse of what we have now adverted to. In the act of becoming a believer, he awakens from the deep and the universal lethargy of nature. With his new hope, commences his new life. He ceases to be stationary,—and what is more, he never ceases to be progressive. He does not satisfy himself with barely moving onwards to a higher point in the scale of human attainment, and then sitting down with the sentiment that it is enough.

He never counts it enough. The practical attitude of the believer is that of one who is ever looking forwards. The practical movement of the believer is that of one who is ever pressing forwards. He could not, without a surrender of those essential principles which make him what he is, tarry at any one point in the gradation of moral excellence. It is not more inseparable from him to be ever doing well, than it is inseparable from him to be ever aspiring to do better. So that the paltry question about the degrees and the comparisons of virtue, he entertains not for a moment; and, with all the aids and the expedients of the gospel for helping his advancement, does he strenuously prosecute the work of conforming to the precept of the gospel,—to be growing in grace, to be perfecting himself in holiness.

It has been a much controverted question, how far this process of continual advancement will carry a believer in this world. Some affirm it will carry him to the point of absolute perfection. Others more cautiously satisfy themselves by the remark, that whether perfection be ever our attainment or not, it ought always to be our aim. And one thing seems to be certain,—that there is no such perfection in this world as might bring along with it the repose of victory. Paul counted all that was behind as nothing, and he pressed onwards. And it is the experience of every Christian, who makes a real business of his sanctification, that there is a struggle between nature and grace, even unto the end. There is no discharge from this warfare, while we are in the body. To the last

hour of life there will be the presence of a carnal nature to humble him, and to make him vigilant; and with every true Christian, there will be the ascendancy of grace, so as that this nature shall not have the dominion over him. The corruption of the old man will be effectually resisted; but not, we fear, till the materialism of our actual frames be resolved into dust, will this corruption be destroyed. "The flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh," is the short, but compendious description of the state of every believer in the world;—and could the evil and adverse principle be eradicated, as well as overborne,—could a living man bid the sinful propensity, with all its workings and all its inclinations, conclusively away from him,—could the authority of the new creature obtain such unrivalled sway over the whole machinery of the affections and the doings, that resistance was no longer felt, and the battle was brought to its termination,—if it were possible, we say, for a disciple, on this side of the grave, to attain the eminency of a condition so glorious, then we know not of what use to him would be either a death or a resurrection; or why he might not bear his earthly tabernacle to heaven, and set him down by direct translation amongst the company of the celestial. But no! There hangs about the person of the most pure and perfect Christian upon earth, some mysterious necessity of dying That body, styled with such emphasis a vile body by the apostle, must be pulverized and made ove. again. And not till that which is sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption,—not till that

which is sown in weakness shall be raised in power, —not till that which is sown a natural body shall be raised a spiritual body,—not till the soul of man occupy another tenement, and the body which now holds him be made to undergo some unknown but glorious transformation, will he know what it is to walk at perfect liberty, and with the full play of his then emancipated powers, to expatiate without frailty, and without a flaw, in the service of his God.

We know that the impression which many have of the disciples of the gospel is, that their great and perpetual aim is, that they may be justified,—that the change of state which they are ever aspiring after, is a change in their forensic state, and not in their personal,—that if they can only attain delivery from wrath, they will be satisfied,—and that the only use they make of Christ, is, through His means, to obtain an erasure of the sentence of their condemnation. Now, though this, undoubtedly, be one great design of the gospel, it is not the design in which it terminates. It may, in fact, be only considered as a preparation for an ulterior accomplishment altogether. Christ came to redeem us from all iniquity, and to "purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." It were selfishness under the guise of sacredness, to sit down in placid contentment, with the single privilege of justification. It is only the introduction to higher privileges.

But not till we submit to the righteousness of Christ as the alone meritorious plea of our acceptance, shall we become personally righteous ourselves,—not till we see the blended love and holi-

ness of the Godhead, in our propitiation, shall we know how to combine a confidence in His mercy, with a reverence for His character,—not till we look to that great transaction, by which the purity of the divine nature is vindicated, and yet the sinner is delivered from the coming vengeance, shall we be freed from the dominion of sin, or be led to admire and to imitate the great Pattern of excellence. The renewing Spirit, indeed, is withheld from all those who withhold their consent from the doctrine of Christ, and of Him crucified. Paul was determined to know nothing else; and it is in this knowledge, and in this alone, that we are renewed after the image of Him who created us.

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

SERMON VII.

SALVATION SCARCELY OBTAINED EVEN BY THE RIGHTEOUS.

"And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear."—1 PETER iv. 18.

THERE are men of no less than three distinct classes of character who have all a part in this brief but most impressive warning. First, the righteous, of whom it is said that they scarcely shall be saved. Secondly, the ungodly; and thirdly, sinners; of whom it is asked, where shall they appear? The two last have one common resemblance; but withal they have certain separate characteristics, which it may be well to notice on the present occasion.

I. It is unnecessary to dwell on the signification of the term righteous in the passage before us—or to insist at any great length on the distinction which obtains between the imputed and the personal righteousness of those who believe. The one is perfect; and from the very first there is in it no scarceness, no short-coming. The second is frail and humble in its commencement, doubtful and various in its progress, and has to struggle its uncertain way through defeats and difficulties and discouragements ere it reaches its full consummation. By the one we are delivered from the guilt of sin.

By the other we are delivered from the power of sin. In virtue of the imputed righteousness, our names are blotted out from that book of condemnation which is kept in the judicatory above. In virtue of the personal righteousness, the pollution of sin is washed away from the heart—and there is a busy work of holiness going forward on each genuine and aspiring pilgrim below. It is a firm and immutable certainty, that if a man believe, he obtains a judicial righteousness in Christ. But it is just as firm a certainty, that if a man believe, he obtains a personal righteousness in his own character. The one is just as indissolubly linked with his salvation as the other—and, if because gifted with the former he rejoices in hope, and has a peace in his heart which passeth all understanding, then, because gifted also with the latter, he plies with utmost diligence and labour all the activities of the christian service, alike instant in duty and watchfulness and prayer.

Now it is obvious, both from the text and from the context, that it is by their personal characteristics that the righteous are contrasted with the ungodly and the sinner. The judgment which begins with the former and ends with the latter, is a judgment which takes cognizance of personal qualities alone. On that day we shall be reckoned with for our doings—and the respective awards of the judgment-seat will proceed on the distinction, on the personal distinction which there is between them who obey and them who obey not. So that in looking forward to that judgment-seat, our great aim should be to perfect our obedience, and to be

diligent that we may be found of Christ in peace without spot and blameless. It is thus, in fact, that we work out our salvation; not salvation from the punishment of sin, for this is effected by the blood of Christ's atoning sacrifice—but salvation from the pollution and the power of sin, which is effected by our striving mightily according to the grace of God which worketh in us mightily. It is in the arduous prosecution of this work, that man presses onward to a mark for a prize, and feels how all his power and strength must be embarked in the undertaking, lest he should fall short of it; that, with much study and much strenuousness, he tries to bring himself nearer every day to an object which still lies in the distance before him; that, yet far beneath the summit of moral or spiritual perfection to which he is aspiring, he plies his toilsome ascent along the narrow and the rugged path by which he is led to it. And so, the images employed in scripture for the work of christianity, are expressive of most intense and sustained effort towards an attainment which after all may not be realised —a battle which requires complete armour, and the busy use of it in order to secure the doubtful victory—a race which many run, but in which few will gain the prize—a narrow path by which many shall seek to pass through the gate of life and not be able, and by which the few only who strive shall make good their entrance into the paradise of God. It is by dint of painful and assiduous striving that salvation is at length carried; and just as the courser may be said scarcely to have won, who with the utmost of his power and fleetness hath

made good his distance by a hair-breadth of space or within a moment of time, so is it said of the righteous by the apostle in our text, that scarcely they are saved.

Now the question we have to put upon all this is, whether the righteous of our day, or those who deem themselves to be so, are really comporting themselves in a way answerable to such a representation? Are they running so as that they may obtain? Are they fighting so as that they may gain a hard-won victory? Are they striving so as that they may force an entrance of great obstruction and difficulty? Where, we ask, are there any symptoms of a work and of a warfare, or of that busy earnestness which a state of probation like ours would seem so imperiously to demand? There is a whole host of people, we are aware, who do stand forth and signalize themselves as the Religionists of the day. But amid all the pretence and profession by which they are distinguished, where is the practical exercise? Where the strenuous, the sustained effort that cometh out of desirous hearts and doing hands? How many or how few are there of these who are diligently plying at the real task-work of christianity? —who are making a business of their sanctification? —who are labouring for Heaven as if pursued by the conviction that without labour they will never make it out, and that even after their utmost labour, they will but save their distance and scarcely reach the goal which they are tending to? Surely, if they proceeded on this view of the matter, their appearance altogether would be that of men upon the stretch—of men, all whose faculties were

pressed into a mighty service—of men in a state of constant and great urgency, on a way beset with many obstacles, and their progress through which required the forth-putting of all their strength and of all their busy expedients. Now we scarcely see this degree of intensity any where. Not certainly among all, if indeed among any, of those who are called the professing people. They have more the semblance of men who have been lulled to sleep by the sound of a pleasant song, than of men who have been roused into action by a spirit-stirring call. Their orthodoxy has acted rather as a sedative than as a stimulant. It has cradled them into a state of repose rather than brought them out into a state of exertion. They are more like men under the power of an opiate, than of men who, awoke from lethargy, and now in the attitude of readiness for service, have their loins girded about and their lamps burning.

Christianity is grievously misunderstood, whenever it is imagined that all this activity and labour are not called for. They are sadly misled by their creeds and their systems, who fancy the death of Christ to be that terminating object, in which the believer has only to rest and do nothing. Instead of this, it is the starting-post of a busy career, whence the Christian breaks forth with hope and alacrity on all the services of a new obedience. "Christ gave himself for us," says the apostle, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." The faith of the gospel so enlarges the heart, as to make him by whom it

is actuated, run in the way of the commandments. There is nought surely of indolence in this. The work which it is given a Christian to do, is not a work done so easily, that it may be lightly, or carelessly, or superficially gone about—but a work done with such exceeding difficulty, that they who do accomplish it, accomplish it but scarcely, and so it is but scarcely that they are saved. To keep the heart with all diligence—to keep the heart in the love of God—to dwell with ever-recurring contemplation on those objects of faith by which gratitude and affectionate loyalty, and all the purposes of new obedience are upholden—to keep a strict and resolute guardianship over the inner man, amid the temptations by which it is both plied from without, and most insidiously operated upon from within—to watch over the infirmities of temper, the perpetual aberrations of selfishness and vanity—to follow after peace when surrounded by provocatives to war, to maintain charity in the midst of cruelest provocations—to be patient under calumny and injustice; and master that most difficult of all achievements, the love of enemies who have hurt or affronted or betrayed us—to bid away all the incitements of sensuality, so as both to have purity in the heart and temperance in the habits, in the presence of a thousand besetting solicitations: In addition to these labours of the unseen Spirit, to fill the whole history with the doings of a visible obedience—to labour in our closets, to labour in our families, to labour in the ordinances of religion, to labour in the attentions and the offices of social intercourse, to labour in the visitations of liberality and kind-

ness, to labour yet with a spirit schooled out of all its worldliness in the business of our callings—these these are the tests of Christianity here; and these, when done to the glory of God, and in the name of Jesus, will be the triumphs of Christianity hereafter. These are the treasures laid up for us in Heaven—not as forming our title-deed to that glorious inheritance of the saints, but as forming our meetness for its exercises and its joys. All the possible acts and virtues of humanity put together, cannot build up a claim to Heaven; but they build up the indispensable character of Heaven. They compose not that imputed righteousness of Christ which is the meritorious plea; but they compose that personal righteousness of his disciples which is their essential preparation. And it is the magnitude of that preparation; it is the loftiness, the spirituality of that law, with the graces and perfections of which they are called upon to clothe themselves; it is the mighty range or extent of a commandment whereof the Psalmist says, that it is exceeding broad—these make the work and the labour of Christianity such that it scarcely can be done—these, as constituting the salvation of believers from sin unto righteousness, give emphatic truth to the saying, that the righteous scarcely can be saved.

Now the first class of believers who ought to feel the force of this representation, are they who have embraced, or who think that they have embraced the faith of the gospel. What an impressive warning to all such that it is but scarcely they shall be saved! You may win, but hardly, and as if within

a hair-breadth. Now to make this out, are you working hardly? Does your seeking amount to any thing like striving? Are you at all like men putting forth your whole might for carrying some point of difficulty? When the fortress stands in a position that is nearly impregnable, we find that all the strength and all the tactics of besiegers are put forth in the business of storming it. Is the kingdom of Heaven, we ask, suffering this violence at your hands; and where are your high resolves, your busy expedients, your struggles and your onsets for taking it by force? Where are your ardent prayers for strength; and then, the stirring up or the putting forth of that strength which is in you for great and arduous performances? And, do you watch as well as pray? It is not the devotion of a little time in the morning, followed up by an utter relaxation of spirit through the day —It is not the observation of all the Sabbath punctualities followed up by a week of earthliness —It is not the sacramental decency, or even the sacramental fervour, followed up by a year, throughout the general tenor of which, you breathe like other men the air of this world's business and this world's companionship—It is not thus that you acquit yourselves like servants, who, as if under the immediate eye of Heaven, are working and waiting for their Lord. Awaken, awaken then all ye, who sit at ease in Zion, if ye would escape the fearfulness which shall overtake the hypocrite, the doom of those who say, Lord, Lord, while they do not the things which he says.

II. Now if such be the ordeal which even the righteous must undergo, what must become of the ungodly? If the former can scarcely pass the judgment in safety, how is it possible that in that judgment the latter can stand? It begins, it would appear, at the house of God, and there it so searches and scrutinizes, that it is but hardly and by a little way, that many, even of Christ's own disciples, shall be found on the right side of the line of demarcation. It ends with those who stand afar off from the precincts of holiness or of heaven, and among them it will be a consuming fire. If the saints, with all their prayers and pains and struggles upon earth, shall but have won their distance by a hair-breadth, and by their much strenuousness have forced, and scarcely forced their admittance within the door of the kingdom—ah! what will become of those sinners, the care of whose souls cost them no strenuousness, who live here as they list, and make this evanescent world their resting-place, without an effort or a wish beyond it. Surely, if among God's own people the sacred jealousy of His nature act as a refiner's fire, to separate the almost from the altogether Christian, it must go forth in one mighty and devouring tide of conflagration among the hosts of the rebellious.

Our purpose in distinguishing the ungodly and the sinners into two classes, is if possible to excite salutary alarm in the breasts of those, who imagine of themselves that they are not sinners—who at least imagine of themselves that they are not in danger, because in reputation and good will among men, they are free from the disgrace of all gross and

notorious delinquencies. They lie not. They steal not. They oppress not the poor; nor do they violate either the equities of business or the proprieties of good neighbourhood. It is a most frequent, nay a most natural delusion among such, that they are not great sinners—and for this best of all reasons that they are chargeable with no great sins. They will not admit the magnitude of their guilt—neither will they admit the magnitude of their danger, till some specific or definite transgression can be alleged against them. In the absence of these they feel a complacency in their present state, and are visited with no disturbance at least, in the contemplation of their future prospects. They stand alike exempted from remorse and terror. And it serves to foster this tranquillity of spirit more, if to the absence of all which they deem to be positively bad, they add the presence of much that is positively good in their character—if they be amiable in the relations of domestic and social life, if they be kind and companionable among their fellows, if they be erect and untainted in honour, if they be trusty in friendship, if they be devoted in patriotism. These are the virtues which uphold, nay beautify the societies of the earth—but what we affirm of one and all of them is, that they do coexist with ungodliness. Along with the presence of these social moralities, there may be the absence or utter destitution of all the sacred moralities. That is a pleasing light which is struck out by the mere workings of instinct in the hearts and among the habitations of men. But it differs from that light which cometh down from the upper sanctuary.

The one is no more like to the other than the tiny lustre of the glow-worm is like unto the firmament's meridian blaze. There may be nought of the celestial in this earth-born virtue; and it is a possible, nay a frequent thing that men shall live and breathe in its atmosphere, yet live without God.

Now, it is for the sake of grouping these men into a company by themselves, that we view the ungodly of our text, as separate from the sinners of our text. They in truth form a distinct class of society—accomplished, and perhaps brilliantly accomplished in the moralities of earth, yet without one thought or one visitation in their spirits of any practical earnestness about the heaven that lies beyond it—free of all those sins which would be termed delinquencies in the world, yet most surely as free of all devotedness in their hearts to Him who made the world—surrounded by the regards of kindness and the obeisances of respect in their neighbourhood below, yet living in a perpetual exile of the affections from Him who is above, at once the Father and the Judge of the human family—lulled into complacency by the thought of the many duties and the many decencies whereof they acquit themselves, yet hastening onward to that day of account, when tried by the question, "What have you done unto God?" they shall be left without a speech and without an argument. Surely, if they who have cared and striven and sought after God all their days, yet after all are but scarcely saved—well may it be asked, what shall become of those who have never cared? If with the one there be such difficulty of salvation,

what are we to conclude of the other, but that with them there is the certainty of damnation? If it be with so much ado that the righteous pass through the ordeal of their coming judgment, how is it possible that the ungodly can stand?

We are not charging you with aught which the world would call monstrous. We charge you only with the negatives of character. You have no practical, no perpetual sense of God. We are not speaking of your vices. We speak only of your defects. You are deficient from searedness. It is not by your profligacies, but simply by your negations that we describe you. You have no godliness, or you are ungodly. Your consciences can tell, whether such be a just representation of yourselves. It can make palpable the difference between the habit of your souls, and that of those whose eye, and the aspiration of whose heart, are ever towards the upper sanctuary—whose delight is in communion with God, and whose chief dread it is to offend Him—who bear upon their spirits at all times a reverential impression of His sacredness; and who strive, with all their vigour and all their vigilance, to uphold that frame of the affections, which most befits the expectant of heaven, and best prepares for its holy services. You can best say if it be thus with you; and whether you now realise those longings and those labourings of the life of faith, by which all the feelings of the inner man, and all the doings of the outer man, are consecrated to the business of a high calling. Even they who are the most strenuous and the most devoted in this business of piety

—even they but scarcely shall be saved; and what, we repeat, can become of those, who, from their cradles to their graves, do but grovel in the dust of that earth which they tread upon, and live without God in the world?

Think not then, that you might sleep on in safety because you have had no crimes. That judgment which shall at length awaken you, will fall in weightiest vengeance upon your head, if it but find you in a state of negation and nakedness. You fancy, that you have done nothing against God. But it is enough that you have lived without God. You are not conscious of such disobedience as any distinct or specific act of rebellion. But enough, that you have not yielded obedience to His reign. It will be vain to allege that you never were a rebel against Him, if He can allege that He never had the rule over you. They are your own wills that have ruled you. It is by the waywardness of your own affections that you have walked. It may not have been on a way of profligacy or on a way of scandalous profaneness; but still it was your own way, and not His way. You have carried it all your lives long, independently of God. Perhaps without any gross violation of the decencies of life, but then you have a taste for decency. Perhaps without any glaring infraction of the integrities of business; but then, you have a native principle of integrity. Perhaps with an habitual homage to the voice of society, and even an occasional homage to the voice of your own conscience; but reckless all the while to the voice of God, and relatively to Him, in as deep a slumber

of unconsciousness as if He were a nonentity or a phantom. Now, you refuse to hear the voice of His rightful authority; and so afterwards you shall be made to hear the thunders of His righteous condemnation.

III. So much for the subtle delusion of those who are ungodly, but feel not themselves to be sinners—and just because, whatever may be the hidden delinquencies of their spirit, there are no specific delinquencies of outward conduct with the matter of which they are chargeable. He who ventures upon the latter kind of disobedience, belongs to a distinct genus of character from that of mere ungodliness. And hence the distinction we would make between the ungodly and the sinner. The one simply cares not for God. The other, more resolute, lifts against Him an open defiance. The one, led by his own will, can perhaps only be charged with the distance of his affections from the person or character of God. The other, in formal and active resistance to the Divine will, may be charged with the despite done by his actions to the authority of God. The one is only disaffected. The other is more, he is disobedient: and while the former is but upon the neutral ground of indifference to God, the latter has planted his daring footstep within the distinct and the declared landmark of a forbidden territory. Such is the difference between him who is ungodly, and him who is a transgressor. The one is destitute of the feeling of loyalty. The other, more stoutly rebellious, hath broken the laws. He hath more outraged

Heaven's high sovereignty. He hath more braved and bid defiance to the authority of God.

It is the more visible nature of his delinquency which lays him opener to the conviction of sin, than the man of decent morality, yet withal rooted ungodliness; and thus also would we explain the declaration of Christ, that publicans and sinners enter the kingdom of heaven before the Pharisees. They are more easily conscience-stricken, just because their sins are more conspicuous. Their fraud, or their falsehood, or their drunkenness, or their impurity, or their sabbath profanations, or their blasphemies, or their acts of oppression and violence; these are more glaring insignia of revolt against the government of Heaven, than is the latent, the lurking ungodliness of a worldly moralist—even though it should leaven his whole heart, and thoroughly impregnate every deed of his history. Both will be reckoned with on the great day of manifestation—the one by the secret things of his heart which shall then be revealed; the other by the deeds done in his body which shall then be judged. But the inward secrets may not be palpable now while the outward deeds are abundantly so. The apostle makes a distinction between those sins which are open before-hand, and those which follow after. It is a distinction realized by the ungodly and the sinner of our text. The rebellion of the former has its firm though unseen hold in the recesses of his bosom. The rebellion of the latter is written in such characters upon his forehead as may be seen and read of all men.

It is thus that while often difficult to awaken con-

viction in the hearts of the mere ungodly—the heart of the sinner may be reached by reading to him in the deeds of his history his own character; and by reading to him, in the character of these deeds, the tremendous destiny which awaits him. It is thus that we would try to lay an arrest on the career of the transgressor. We would appeal to his own consciousness of his own doings. We would remind him of the sabbaths that he has violated, or of the execrations that he has poured forth, or of the impurities and excesses that he has indulged in, or of the dishonesties in business that he has committed, or of the relative duties that he has broken, or of the calumnies whether heedless or malignant wherewith he has soiled a neighbour's reputation. We need not speak to him of the ungodliness that is in his heart, when things like these have broken out upon his history—the overt-acts of rebellion—the expressions of a distinct and declared warfare against Heaven's throne. And O, if he but knew the inviolable sacredness of Him who sitteth thereon—of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and before the rebuke of whose countenance all the derision and defiance of the hardiest in wickedness must at last melt away—surely he would judge it better to recall himself in time than to appear with all the aggravations of his uncancelled guilt before the judgment-seat. The voice of welcome and of good-will still calls upon him from the mercy-seat; and that God, the book of whose remembrance is laden with the record of his misdoings, is still willing that they shall all be blotted out in the blood of the great atonement: and if he

will only break off his sins by righteousness and turn him to Christ who is mighty to save, the way of renovation is yet open; and the great Lawgiver, whom he has so oft offended, beckons him to draw nigh and taste of His graciousness. Such is the offer now; but let both the sinner and the ungodly recollect, that this season of opportunity will soon pass away. The invitations of God's tenderness will give place, and that speedily, to the terrors of a vengeance which will burn all the more fiercely because of a slighted gospel, and a rejected Saviour. Be alive then to the urgency of the present call, to the power and the encouragement of the present invitation. Kiss the Son while He is in the way —lest his wrath should begin to burn—when blessed only shall they be who have put their trust in Him.

SERMON VIII.

ON THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION.

"And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.—Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."—ACTS xxvii. 22, 31.

THE comparison of these two verses lands us in what may appear to many to be a very dark and unprofitable speculation. Now, our object in setting up this comparison, is not to foster in any of you a tendency to meddle with matters too high for us—but to protect you against the practical mischief of such a tendency. You have all heard of the doctrine of predestination. It has long been a settled article of our church. And there must be a sad deal of evasion and of unfair handling with particular passages, to get free of the evidence which we find for it in the Bible. And independently of Scripture altogether, the denial of this doctrine brings a number of monstrous conceptions along with it. It supposes God to make a world, and not to reserve in His own hand the management of its concerns. Though it should concede to him an absolute sovereignty over all matter, it deposes Him from His sovereignty over the region of created minds, that far more dignified and interesting portion of His works. The greatest events in the history

of the universe, are those which are brought about by the agency of willing and intelligent beings—and the enemies of the doctrine invest every one of these beings with some sovereign and independent principle of freedom, in virtue of which it may be asserted of this whole class of events, that they happened, not because they were ordained of God, but because the creatures of God, by their own uncontrolled power, brought them into existence. At this rate, even He to whom we give the attribute of omniscience, is not able to say at this moment, what shall be the fortune or the fate of any individual—and the whole train of future history is left to the wildness of accident. All this, carries along with it so complete a dethronement of God—it is bringing His creation under the dominion of so many nameless and undeterminable contingencies—it is taking the world and the current of its history so entirely out of the hands of Him who formed it—it is withal so opposite to what obtains in every other field of observation, where, instead of the lawlessness of chance, we shall find that the more we attend, the more we perceive of a certain necessary and established order—that from these and other considerations which might be stated, the doctrine in question, in addition to the testimonies which we find for it in the Bible, is at this moment receiving a very general support from the speculations of infidel as well as Christian philosophers.

Assenting, as we do, to this doctrine, we state it as our conviction, that God could point the finger of His omniscience to every one individual amongst us, and tell what shall be the fate of each, and the

place of each, and the state of suffering or enjoyment of each, at any one period of futurity however distant. Well does He know those of us who are vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, and those of us whom He has predestinated to be conformed to the image of His dear Son, and to be rendered meet for the inheritance. We are not saying, that we, or that any of you could so cluster and arrange the two sets of individuals. This is one of the secret things which belong to God. It is not our duty to be altogether silent about the doctrine of predestination—for the Bible is not silent about it, and it is our duty to promulgate and to hold up our testimony for all that we find there. But certain it is, that the doctrine has been so injudiciously meddled with—it has tempted so many ingenious and speculative men to transgress the limits of Scripture—it has engendered so much presumption among some, and so much despondency among others—it has been so much abused to the mischief of practical Christianity, that it were well for us all, could we carefully draw the line between the secret things which belong to God and the things which are revealed, and belong to us and to our children.

With this view, we shall, in the first place, lay before you the observations which are suggested by the immediate history in the passage now submitted to you. And in the second place, we shall attempt to evince its application to us of the present day, and in how far it should carry an influence over the concerns of practical godliness.

I. In the 22d verse Paul announces in absolute terms, that all the men of the ship were to be saved. He had been favoured with this intimation from the mouth of an angel. It was the absolute purpose of God, and no obstacle whatever could prevent its accomplishment. To Him belongs that knowledge which sees every thing, and that power which determines every thing; and He could say to His prophet, "These men will certainly be saved." Compare this with what we have in the 31st verse. By this time the sailors had given up all hope of the safety of the vessel. They had toiled, as they thought, in vain—and in despair of doing any good, they ceased from working the ship, and resolved to abandon her. With this view, they let down the boat to try the chance of deliverance for themselves, and leave the passengers to perish. Upon this Paul, though his mind had been previously assured, by an intimation from the foreknowledge and predestination of God, that there should be no loss of men's lives, put on all the appearance of earnestness and urgency—and who can doubt, that he really felt this earnestness at the moment of his speaking to the centurion, when he told him, that unless these men should abide in the ship, they would not be saved? He had before told them, in the most unrestricted terms, that they would be saved. But this does not restrain his practical urgency now—and the urgency of Paul gave an alarm and a promptitude to the mind of the centurion—and the centurion ordered his soldiers to cut the ropes which fastened the boat to the vessel, that the sailors deprived of this

mode of escape, might be forcibly detained among them—and the soldiers obeyed—and the sailors were kept on board, and rendered the full benefit of their seamanship and their exertions. They did what other passengers could not do. They lightened the ship. They took up the anchors. They loosed the rudder-bands. They hoised up the mainsail to the wind—and the upshot of this long intermediate process, with all its steps, was, that the men escaped safe to land, and the decree of God was accomplished.

Now, in the first instance, it was true, in the most absolute sense of the word, that these men were to be saved. And in the second instance, it was no less true, that unless the sailors abode in the ship, they could not be saved. And the terms of this apparent contradiction admit of a very obvious reconciliation on the known truth, that God worketh by instruments. He may carry every one purpose of His into immediate accomplishment by the direct energy of His own hands. But, in point of fact, this is not His general way of proceeding. He chooses rather to arrive at the accomplishment of many of His objects by a succession of steps, or by the concurrence of one or more visible instruments, which require time for their operation. This is a truth to which all nature and all experience lend their testimony. It was His purpose that, at the moment I am now addressing you, there should be light over the face of the country, and this purpose He accomplishes by the instrumentality of the sun. There is a time coming, when light shall be furnished out to

us in another way—when there shall be no need either of the sun or the moon to lighten the city of our habitation—but when the glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb shall be the light thereof. But this is not the way at present, and, therefore, it is both true, that it was God's purpose there should be light over us and around us at this moment, and that unless the sun had risen upon us this morning, there would have been no such light. It may be the purpose of God to bless the succeeding year with a plentiful harvest. He could accomplish this purpose in two ways. He could make the ripened corn start into existence by a single word of His power. But this is not the actual way in which He carries such designs into accomplishment. He does it by the co-operation of many visible instruments. It is true, He can pour abundance among us even in the midst of adverse weather and unfavourable seasons. But He actually does it by means of favourable weather and favourable seasons. It is not in spite of bad weather that we receive from His hands the blessings of plenty—but in consequence of good weather—sunshine and shower succeeding each other in fit proportion—calm to prevent the shaking of the corn, and wind in sufficient quantity to winnow it and make a prosperous ingathering. Should it be the purpose of God to give a plentiful harvest to us next year, it will certainly happen, and yet it may be no less true, that unless such weather come, we shall have no plentiful harvest. God, who appoints the end, orders and presides over the whole series of means which lead to it.

These visible causes are all in His hand. They are the instruments of His power. The elements are His, and He can either restrain their violence, or let them loose in fury upon the world.

Now, look upon human beings as the instruments of His pleasure, and you have an equally complete explanation of the passage before us. You will be made to understand how it is true, that it was God's absolute purpose that the men of the vessel should be saved; and how it is equally true, that unless the sailors abode in the ship, they could not be saved. Why, the same God who determined the end, gave certain efficacy to the means which He Himself had instituted and set agoing for the accomplishment of the end. It does not at all affect the certainty of God's influence over these means, that, in addition to wind, and water, and material elements, there were also human beings employed as instruments for carrying His purpose into execution. It is expressly said of God, not only that He stilleth the waves of the sea, but that He also stilleth the tumults of the people, and that He can turn the heart of man as the rivers of water, turning it whithersoever He will. He appoints the end, and it does not at all lessen the sure and absolute nature of the appointment, that He brings it about by a long succession of means, provided that it is His power which gives effect to every step in the progress and operation of these means. Now, in the case before us, there was just such a progress as we pointed out in the case of a favourable harvest. He had determined, that all the men of the vessel should be saved; but

agreeably to the method of His administration in other cases, He brought it about by the operation of instruments. He did not save them against the use of instruments, but He did it by the use of instruments. The instruments He employed were men. Paul speaking to the centurion—the centurion ordering the soldiers to cut the ropes, and let the boat away from the vessel—the sailors obliged to work for their own safety—these were the instruments of God, and He had as much command over them as of any others He has created. He brought about the saving of the men by means of those instruments, as certainly as He brings about a good harvest by the instrumentality of favourable weather, and congenial seasons. He is as much master of the human heart and its determinations, as He is of the elements. He reigns in the mind of man, and can turn its purposes in any way that suits His purposes. He made Paul speak. He made the centurion listen and be impressed by it. He made the soldiers obey. He made the sailors exert themselves. The conditional assertion of the 31st verse was true—but He made the assertion serve the purpose for which it was uttered. He over-ruled the condition, and brought about the fulfilment of the absolute prophecy in the 22d verse. The whole of this process was as completely overruled by Him as any other process in nature—and in virtue too of the very same power by which He can cause the wind of heaven to fly loose upon the world, make the rain descend, the corn ripen into harvest, and all the blessings of plenty sit in profusion over a happy and a favoured land.

There is no inconsistency then between these verses. God says in one of them, by the mouth of Paul, that these men were certainly to be saved. And Paul says in the other of these verses, that unless the centurion and soldiers were to do so and so they should not be saved. In one of the verses, it is made to be the certain and unfailing appointment of God. In the other it is made to depend on the centurion. There is no difficulty in all this, if you would just consider, that God, who made the end certain, made the means certain also. It is true, that the end was certainly to happen, and it is as true that the end would not have happened without the means—but God secured the happening of both, and so gave 'sureness and consistency to the passage before us.

Now, it is worth while to attend here both to the conduct of Paul who gave the directions, and to the conduct of the centurion who obeyed them. Paul, who gave the directions, knew, in virtue of the revelation that was made to him some time before, that the men were certainly to be saved; and yet this does not prevent him from urging them to the practical adoption of means for saving themselves. He knew that their being saved was a thing predestinated, and as sure as the decree of heaven could make it; but he must likewise have known, that while it was God's counsel they should be saved, it was also God's will that they should be saved by the exertions of the sailors—that they were the instruments He made choice of—that this was the way in which He wished it to be brought about—and Paul had too high a reverence for the

will of God, to decline the use of those practical expedients, which formed the likeliest way of carrying this will into effect. It is a very striking circumstance, that the same Paul who knew absolutely and unequivocally that the men were to be saved, could also say, and say with truth, that unless the sailors were detained in the ship, they should not be saved. Both were true, and both were actually brought about. The thing was done by the appointment of God, and it was also done by a voluntary act on the part of the centurion and his soldiers. Paul knew of the appointment; but he did not feel himself exempted by this knowledge, from the work of practically influencing the will of the people who were around him; and the way in which he got them to act, was by bringing the urgency of a prevailing argument to bear upon them. He told them that their lives depended upon it. God put it into Paul's heart to make use of the argument; and he gave it that influence over the hearts of those to whom it was addressed, that by the instrumentality of men, His purpose, conceived from eternity, and revealed beforehand to the Apostle, was carried forward to its accomplishment.

And again, as the knowledge that they were to be saved, did not prevent Paul from giving directions to the centurion and soldiers for saving themselves—neither did it prevent them from a practical obedience to these directions. It does not appear whether they actually at this time believed Paul to be a messenger of God—though it is likely, from the previous history of the voyage, that they did. If they did not, then they acted

as the great majority of men do, they acted as unconscious instruments for the execution of the divine purposes. But if they did believe Paul to be a prophet, it is highly striking to observe, that the knowledge they had gotten from his mouth of their really and absolutely escaping with their lives, did not slacken their utmost degree of activity in the business of working for the preservation of their lives, at a bidding from the mouth of the same prophet. He is a prophet from God—and whatever he says must be true. He tells us we are to escape with our lives—let us believe this and rejoice in it. But he also tells us, that unless we do certain things, we shall not escape with our lives—let us believe this also, and do these things. A fine example, on the one hand, of their faithful dependence on his declarations, and, on the other, of their practical obedience to his requirements. If one were to judge by the prosperous result of the whole business, the way in which the centurion and soldiers were affected by the different revelations of Paul, was the very way which satisfied God—for it was rewarded with success, and issued both in the fulfilment of His decree, and the completion of their deliverance.

II. We now come to the second thing proposed, which was to evince the application of the passage to us of the present day—and how far it should carry an influence over the concerns of practical godliness.

We shall rejoice in the first instance, if the explanation we have now given, have the effect of

clearing away any of those perplexities which throw a darkening cloud over the absolute and universal sovereignty of God. We are ready enough to concede to the Supreme Being the administration of the material world, and to put into His hand all the force of its mighty elements. But let us carry the commanding influence of Deity into the higher world of moral and intelligent beings. Let us not erect the will of the creature into an independent principle. Let us not conceive that the agency of man can bring about one single iota of deviation from the plans and the purposes of God—or that He can be thwarted and compelled to vary in a single case, by the movement of any of those subordinate beings whom He Himself has created. There may be a diversity of operations, but it is God who worketh all in all. Look at the resolute and independent man; and you there see the purposes of the human mind entered upon with decision, and followed up by a vigorous and successful exertion. But these only make up one diversity of God's operations. The will of man, active, and spontaneous, and fluctuating as it appears to be, is an instrument in His hand—and He turns it at His pleasure—and he brings other instruments to act upon it—and He plies it with all its excitements—and He measures the force and proportion of each of them—and every step of every individual receives as determinate a character from the hand of God, as every mile of a planet's orbit, or every gust of wind, or every wave of the sea, or every particle of flying dust, or every rivulet of flowing water. This power of God knows no

exceptions. It is absolute and unlimited; and while it embraces the vast, it carries its resistless influence to all the minute and unnoticed diversities of existence. It reigns and operates through all the secrecies of the inner man. It gives birth to every purpose. It gives impulse to every desire. It gives shape and colour to every conception. It wields an entire ascendancy over every attribute of the mind; and the will, and the fancy, and the understanding, with all the countless variety of their hidden and fugitive operations, are submitted to it. It gives movement and direction through every one point in the line of our pilgrimage. At no one moment of time does it abandon us. It follows us to the hour of death, and it carries us to our place and our everlasting destiny in the region beyond it. It is true, that no one gets to heaven, but he, who by holiness, is meet for it. But the same power which carries us there, works in us the meetness. And if we are conformed to the image of the Saviour, it is by the energy of the same predestinating God, whose good pleasure it is to give unto us the kingdom prepared for us before the foundation of the world.

Thus it is that some are elected to everlasting life. This is an obvious doctrine of Scripture. The Bible brings it forward; and it is not for us, the interpreters of the Bible, to keep it back from you. God could, if it pleased Him, read out at this moment, the names of those in this congregation, who are ordained to eternal life, and are written in his book. In reference to their deliverance from shipwreck, He enabled Paul to say of the whole

ship's company, that they were to be saved. In reference to your deliverance from wrath and from punishment, He could reveal to us the names of the elect among you, and enable us to say of them that they are certainly to be saved.

But again, the same God who ordains the end, ordains also the means which go before it. In virtue of the end being ordained and made known to him, Paul could say that all the men's lives were to be saved. And in virtue of the means being ordained and made known to him, he could also say, that unless the sailors abode in the ship, they should not be saved. In the same manner, if the ordained end were made known to us, we could, perhaps, say of some individual among you, that you are certainly to be saved. And if the ordained means were made known to us, we could say, that unless you are rendered meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, you shall not be saved. Now the ordination of the end God has not been pleased to reveal to us. He has not told us who among you are to be saved, as He told Paul of the deliverance of his ship's company. This is one of the secret things which belong to Him, and we dare not meddle with it. But He has told us about the ordained means; and we know, through the medium of the Bible, that unless you do such and such things, you shall not be saved. This is one of the revealed things which belong to us; and with as great truth and practical urgency as Paul made use of, when he said to the centurion and soldiers, that unless these men abide in the ship ye shall not be saved, do we say to one and to all of

you, unless ye repent ye shall not be saved—unless ye do works meet for repentance, ye shall not be saved—unless ye believe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, ye shall not be saved—unless ye are born again, ye shall not be saved—unless the deeds done in your body be good deeds, and ye bring forth those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God, ye shall not be saved.

Mark the difference between the situation of Paul urging upon the people of the ship the immediate adoption of the only way by which their lives could be saved, and the situation of an ordinary minister urging it upon the people of his church, to take to that way of faith and repentance, by which alone they can save their souls from the wrath that is now abiding on them. Paul did know that the people were certainly to escape with their lives, and that did not prevent him from pressing upon them the measures which they ought to adopt for their preservation. Even then, though a minister did know those of his people whose names are written in the book of life, that ought not to hinder him from pressing it upon them to lay hold of eternal life—to lay up their treasure in heaven—to labour for the meat that endureth—to follow after that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord—to be strong in the faith, and such a faith too as availeth, even faith which worketh by love; and of which we may say, even to those whom we assuredly know to be the chosen heirs of immortality, that unless this faith abideth in them, they shall not be saved. But it so happens, that

we do not know who are, and who are not, the children of election. This is a secret thing belonging to God, and which is not imparted to us. Even though it were imparted to us, still it would be our part to say to those of whose final salvation we were assured, believe the Gospel, or you shall not be saved—repent, or you shall not be saved—purify yourselves even as God is pure, or you shall not be saved. But we are not in possession of the secret—and how much more then does it lie upon us to ply with earnestness the fears and the consciences of our hearers, by those revealed things which God hath been pleased to make known to us? What! if Paul, though assured by an angel from heaven of the final deliverance of his ship's company, still persists in telling them, that if they leave certain things undone, their deliverance will be impossible —shall we, utterly in the dark about the final state of a single hearer we are addressing, let down for a single instant the practical urgency of the New Testament? The predestination of God respecting the final escape of Paul and his fellow-travellers from shipwreck, though made known to the Apostle, did not betray him into the indolence which is ascribed, and falsely ascribed, to the belief of this doctrine; nor did it restrain him from spiriting on the people to the most strenuous and fatiguing exertions. And shall we, who only know in general that God does predestinate, but cannot carry it home with assurance to a single individual, convert this doctrine into a plea for indolence and security? Even should we see the mark of God upon their foreheads, it would be our duty to urge on them

the necessity of doing those things, which, if left undone, will exclude from the kingdom of God. But, we make no such pretensions. We see no mark upon any of your foreheads. We possess no more than the Bible, and access through the Mediator to him, who, by His Spirit, can open our understandings to understand it. The revealed things which we find there belong to us, and we press them upon you—"Unless ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." "If ye believe not in the Son of God, the wrath of God abideth in you." "Be not deceived, neither covetous, nor thieves, nor extortioners, nor drunkards, shall inherit the kingdom of God." "He who forsaketh not all, shall not be a disciple of Christ." "The fearful, and the unbelieving, and the abominable, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." These are plain declarations, and apart from the doctrine of predestination altogether, they ought, and if they are believed and listened to, they will have a practical influence upon you. We call upon you not to resist this influence but to cherish it. If any of you are the children of election, it is by the right influence of revealed things upon your understandings and your consciences, that this secret thing will be brought to pass. Paul said as much to the centurion and the soldiers, as that if you do the things I call upon you to do, you will certainly be saved. They did what he bade them; and the decree of God respecting their deliverance from shipwreck, a decree which Paul had the previous knowledge of, was accomplished. We also feel ourselves warranted to say to one and

to all of you, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved." "Repent and be converted, and your sins shall be forgiven you." Return unto God, and He will be reconciled. If you do as we bid you, God's decree respecting your deliverance from hell, a decree which we have not the previous knowledge of, will be made known by its accomplishment.

Again, we call upon you, our hearers, to compare your situation with that of the centurion and the soldiers. They were told by a prophet that they were to be saved; and when that prophet told them what they were to do for the purpose of saving themselves, they obeyed him. They did not say, "O it is all predestinated, and we may give up our anxieties, and do nothing." They were just as strenuous and as active, as if there had been no predestination in the matter. Paul's previous assurance, that all was to end well, had no effect in lulling them to indolence. It did end well, not however without their exertions, but by their exertions. How much more does it lie upon you to enter with earnestness upon the business of doing! We can give you no assurance of its being the decree of God, that any of you shall be saved. But we can give you the assurance, that you will be saved, if you do such and such things. Surely, if the people whom Paul addressed, did not feel themselves exempted by their knowledge of God's decree, from practically entering upon those measures which carried forward its accomplishment, you, who have no such knowledge, must feel doubly impelled by the uncertainty which hangs

over you, to the work of making your calling and your election sure. You know in general, that predestination is a doctrine of the Bible; but there is not one of you who can say of himself, that God has made known his decrees to me, and given me directly to understand, that I am the object of a blessed predestination. This is one point of which you know nothing; but there is another point of which you know something—and that is, if I believe, if I repent, if I be made like unto Christ, if I obtain the Holy Spirit to work in me a conformity to His image, and I am told, that I shall obtain it if I ask it—then by this I become an heir of life; and the decree of which I know nothing at the outset of my concern about salvation, will become more and more apparent to me as I advance in a meetness for heaven, and will, at length, become fully, and finally, and conclusively made known by its accomplishment. I may suffer my curiosity to expatiate on the question, "Am I, or am I not, of the election of God?" But my wisdom tells me that this is not the business on hand. It is not the matter which I am called on to do with at present. After Paul said to his companions, that it was quite indispensable to their safety that the sailors should be kept in the vessel, what did the centurion and his men do? Did they fall a-speculating about the decrees? Did they hug themselves in the confidence, that as their safety was a point sure and determined upon, they need to take no trouble at all in the concern? O no! No sooner did Paul give the word, than they acted upon it. They gave themselves up

with all the promptitude of men whose lives were at stake, to the business on hand. They cut the ropes—they let go the boat—they kept in the sailors—and from the very first moment of Paul's address to them on the subject, all was bustling, and strenuous, and unremitting activity; till, by the unwearied perseverance of these living and operative instruments, the decree of God was accomplished. Now, they were much better acquainted with the decree which respected them, than you are with the decree respecting you. They had the beforehand knowledge of it, and will you be less active, or less strenuous, than they? Do, therefore, betake yourselves to the business on hand. Let our exhortations to embrace the free offer of the Gospel—to rely on Christ as your Saviour—to resolve against all your iniquities, and turn unto Him—to ply the throne of grace for the strengthening influence of that Spirit, by which alone you are enabled to die unto all sin, and live unto all righteousness—let this have an immediate, and a stirring, and a practical influence upon you. If you put this influence away from you, you are in a direct way now of proving what we tremble to think may be rendered clear and indisputable at last, on the great day of the revelation of hidden things, that you have neither part nor lot in the matter. Whatever the employment be which takes you up, and hinders you from entering immediately on the work of faith and repentance, it is an alarming symptom of your soul, that you are so taken up—and, should the employment be an idle dreaming, and amusing of yourselves with the de-

crees and counsels of heaven, it is not the less alarming. Some will spend their time in inquiries about the number of the saved, when they ought to be striving for themselves, that they might obtain an entrance into the strait gate; and some will waste those precious moments in speculating about the secrets of the book of life, which they should fill up by supporting themselves, and making progress through the narrowness of the way that leads to it. The plain business we lay upon you, is to put away from you the evil of your doings—to submit yourselves to Christ as He is offered to you—to fly to His atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of your offences—to place yourselves under the guidance of His word, and a dependence on the influences of His Spirit—to live no longer to yourselves, but to Him—and to fill up your weeks and your days with those fruits of righteousness, by which God is glorified. We stand here by the decree of heaven, and it is by the same decree that you are now sitting round and listening to us. We feel the importance of the situation we occupy; and though we believe in the sovereignty of God, and the unfailingness of all His appointments, this, instead of restraining, impels us to bring the message of the Gospel, with all the practical urgency of its invitations, and its warnings, to bear upon you. We feel, with all our belief in predestination, that our business is not to forbear this urgency, but to ply you with it most anxiously, and earnestly, and unceasingly—and you should feel with the same belief in your mind, that your business is not to resist this urgency, but to be guided by its

impulse. Who knows but we may be the humble instrument, and you the undeserved subjects of some high and heavenly ordination? The cutting of the ropes was the turning point on which the deliverance of Paul's company from shipwreck was suspended. Who knows but the urgency we now ply you with, telling upon you, and carrying your purposes along with it, may be the very step in the wonderful progress of God's operations, on which your conversion hinges? We, therefore, press the Gospel with all its duties, and all its promises, and all its privileges upon you. O listen, and resolve, and, manfully forsaking all that keeps you from the Saviour, we call upon you, from this moment, to give yourselves up unto Him; and be assured, it is only by acting in obedience to such calls laid before you in the Bible, and sounded in your ear from the pulpit, that your election unto life can ever be made known in this world, or reach its positive consummation in eternity.

And now you can have no difficulty in understanding how it is that we make our calling and our election sure. It is not in the power of the elect to make their election surer in itself than it really is—for this is a sureness which is not capable of receiving any addition. It is not in the power of the elect to make it surer to God—for all futurity is submitted to His all-seeing eye; and His absolute knowledge stands in need of no confirmation. But there is such a thing as the elect being ignorant for a time of their own election, and their being made sure of it in the progress of evidence and discovery. And therefore it is that they are called

to make their election sure to themselves, or to make themselves sure of their election. And how is this to be done? Not by reading it in the book of God's decrees—not by obtaining from Him any direct information about his counsels—not by conferring with prophet or angel, gifted with the revelation of hidden things. But the same God who elects some unto everlasting life, and keeps back from them all direct information about it, tells them that he who believeth, and he who repenteth, and he who obeyeth the Gospel, shall obtain everlasting life. We shall never in this world have an immediate communication from Him, whether we are of the elect or not—but let us believe—let us repent—let us obey the Saviour—and from the first moment of our setting ourselves to these things in good earnest, we may conceive the hope of a place among the heirs of immortality. In the progress and success of our endeavours, this hope may advance and grow brighter within us. As we grow in the exercises of faith and obedience, the light of a cheering manifestation is more sensibly felt, and our hope ripens into assurance. "Hereby do we know that we know him, by our keeping his commandments," is an evidence which every year becomes clearer and more encouraging; and thus, by a well-sustained perseverance in the exercises of the Christian life, do we labour with all diligence to make our calling and election sure. We call upon you, in the language of the Apostle, to have faith, and to this faith add virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly kindness, and charity. It is by the doing of

these things, that you are made sure of your calling and election, "for if ye do these things," says Peter, "ye shall never fail, and an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

If there be any of you who have not followed this train of observation—if it still remain one of those things of Paul which are hard to be understood—let us beseech you, at least, that you wrest it not to your own destruction, by remitting your activity, and your diligence, and your painstaking in the service of Christ. Why, the doctrine of election leaves our duty to exhort, and your duty to obey, on the same footing on which it found them. We are commissioned to lay before you the free offer of the Gospel—to press it on the acceptance of one and all of you—to assure every individual amongst you of a hearty welcome from the Lord God merciful and gracious—to call you to the service of Christ, that great Master of the household of faith—to urge it upon you, that you must renounce every other master, and, casting all your idols, and vanities, and iniquities away from you, to close with the invitation, and be diligent in all the duties and performances of the Gospel. If you resist, or put off—if, blind to the goodness of God in Christ Jesus, you suffer it not to lead you to repentance—if the call of "awake to righteousness, and sin not," make no practical impression on you—if the assurance of pardon for the sins of the past, do not fill your heart with the desire of sanctification for the future—if the word

of Christ be not so received by you as to lead to the doing of it—then you are just leaving undone those things, of which we say in the words of the text, "Except these things be done, ye cannot be saved"—and to all the guilt of your past disobedience, you add the aggravation of putting away from you both the offered atonement and the commanded repentance of the Gospel, and "how can you escape if you neglect so great a salvation?"

SERMON IX.

ON THE NATURE OF THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall *not* be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."—MATTHEW xii. 31, 32.

Let us never suspend the practical influence of what we do know, by idly rambling in a vain and impertinent pursuit after what we do not know. Thus much we know from the Bible, that God refuses not His Holy Spirit to them who ask it—that every right movement of principle within us is from Him—that when we feel an impulse of conscience, we feel the Spirit of God knocking at the door of our hearts, and challenging from us that attention and that obedience which are due to the great Lawgiver—that if we follow not the impulse, we provoke and dissatisfy Him who is the Author of it—and that there is such a thing as tempting Him to abandon us altogether, and to surrender the friendly office of plying us any longer with His admonitions and His warnings. Hence, an emphatic argument for immediate repentance. By every moment of delay, we hasten upon our-

selves the awful crisis of being let alone. The conscience is every day getting harder; and He who sits behind, and is the unseen Author of all its instigations, is lifting every day a feebler voice; and coming always nearer and nearer to that point in the history of every determined sinner, when left to his own infatuation, he can hold up a stubborn and unyielding front to all that instrumentality of advice and of expostulation which is brought to bear upon him. The preacher plies him with his weekly voice, but the Spirit refuses to lend it His constraining energy—and all that is tender, and all that is terrifying in his Sabbath argument plays around his heart, without reaching it. The judgments of God go abroad against him, and as he carries his friends or his children to the grave, a few natural tears may bear witness to the tenderness he bore them—but that Spirit who gives to these judgments all their moral significancy, withholds from him the anointing which remaineth; and the man relapses as before into all the obstinate habits, and all the uncrucified affections which he has hitherto indulged in. The disease gathers upon him, and gets a more rooted inveteracy than ever—and thus it is, that there are thousands and thousands more, who, though active and astir on that living scene of population which is around us, have an iron hardness upon their souls, which makes them, in reference to the things of God, dark and sullen as the grave, and fast locks them in all the insensibility of spiritual death. Is there no old man of your acquaintance, who realizes this sad picture of one left to himself, that we have

now attempted so rapidly to set before you? Then know, that by every deed of wilful sin, that by every moment of wilful delay in the great matter of repentance, that by every stifled warning of conscience, that by every deafening of its authoritative voice among the temptations of the world, and the riot of lawless acquaintances, you are just moving yourself nearer to the limits of this helpless and irrecoverable condition. We have no doubt, that you may have the intention of making a violent step, and suddenly turning round to the right path ere you die. But this you will not do but by an act of obedience to the reproaches of a conscience that is ever getting harder. This you will not do without the constraining influence of that Spirit, who is gradually dying away from you. This you will not do but in virtue of some overpowering persuasion from that monitor who is now stirring within you, but with whom you are now taking the most effectual method of drowning His voice, and disarming Him of all his authority. Do not you perceive, that, in these circumstances, every act of delay is madness—that you are getting by every hour of it into deeper water—that you are consolidating a barrier against your future return to the paths of righteousness, which you vainly think you will be able to surmount when the languor and infirmity of old age have got hold of you—that you are strengthening and multiplying around you the wiles of an entanglement, which all the strugglings of deathbed terror cannot break asunder—that you are insulting the Spirit of God by this daily habit of stifling and neglecting the other

and the other call that He is sounding to your moral ear, through the organ of conscience. And O the desperate hazard and folly of such a calculation! Think you, think you, that this is the way of gaining His friendly presence at that awful moment, when the urgent sense of guilt and of danger forces from the sinner an imploring cry as he stands on the brink of eternity?

"How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof. Behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you; I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you: then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

You see, then, how a man may shut against himself all the avenues of reconciliation. There is nothing mysterious in the kind of sin by which the Holy Spirit is tempted to abandon him to that state in which there can be no forgiveness, and no return unto God. It is by a movement of conscience within him, that the man is made sensible of sin—that he is visited with the desire of reformation—that he is given to feel his need both of mercy to pardon, and of grace to help him—in a word,

that he is drawn unto the Saviour, and brought into that intimate alliance with Him by faith, which brings down upon him both acceptance with the Father, and all the power of a new and a constraining impulse, to the way of obedience. But this movement is a suggestion of the Spirit of God, and if it be resisted by any man, the Spirit is resisted. The God who offers to draw him unto Christ, is resisted. The man refuses to believe, because his deeds are evil; and by every day of perseverance in these deeds, the voice which tells him of their guilt, and urges him to abandon them, is resisted —and thus, the Spirit ceases to suggest, and the Father, from whom the Spirit proceedeth, ceases to draw, and the inward voice ceases to remonstrate—and all this because their authority has been so often put forth, and so often turned from. This is the deadly offence which has reared an impassable wall against the return of the obstinately impenitent. This is the blasphemy to which no forgiveness can be granted, because in its very nature, the man who has come this length, feels no movement of conscience towards that ground on which alone forgiveness can be awarded to him—and where it is never refused even to the very worst and most malignant of human iniquities. This is the sin against the Holy Ghost. It is not peculiar to any one age. It does not lie in any one unfathomable mystery. It may be seen at this day in thousands and thousands more, who, by that most familiar and most frequently exemplified of all habits, a habit of resistance to a sense of duty, have at length stifled it altogether, and driven their inward

monitor away from them, and have sunk into a profound moral lethargy, and so will never obtain forgiveness—not because forgiveness is ever refused to any who repent and believe the Gospel, but because they have made their faith and their repentance impracticable. They choose not to repent—and this choice has been made so often and so perseveringly, that the Spirit has let them alone. They have obstinately clung to their love of darkness rather than of light, and the Spirit has at length turned away from them since they will have it so. They wish not to believe, because their deeds are evil, and that Spirit has ceased to strive with them, who has so often spoken to them in vain—and whose many remonstrances have never prevailed upon them to abandon the evil of their doings.

Take all this attentively along with you, and the whole mysteriousness of this sin against the Holy Ghost should be done away. Grant Him the office with which He is invested in the Word of God, even the office of instigating the conscience to all its reprovals of sin, and to all its admonitions of repentance—and then, if ever you witnessed the case of a man whose conscience had fallen into a profound and irrecoverable sleep, or, at least, had lost to such a degree its power of control over him, that he stood out against every engine which was set up to bring him to the faith and repentance of the New Testament—behold in such a man a sinner against conscience to such a woful extent, that conscience had given up its direction of him; or, in other words, a sinner against

the Holy Ghost to such an extent, that He had let down the office of warning him away from that ground of danger and of guilt on which he stood so immoveably posted—or, of urging him onward to that sure road of access, where if a man seek for pardon, he will never miss it, and where, if he cry for the clean heart and the right spirit, he will not cry in vain.

And as there is nothing dark or incomprehensible in the nature of this sin, so there is nothing in it to impair the freeness of the gospel—or the universality of its calls and of its offers—or its power of salvation to all who will—or that attribute which is expressly ascribed to it, that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. It is never said that pardon through that blood, which is distinctly stated to cleanse from all sin, it is nowhere said, that this pardon is extended to any but to those who believe. If you do not believe, you do not get pardon—and if you will not believe, because you love darkness rather than light—if you will not believe, because you will not abandon those evil deeds which the Spirit tells you through the conscience, that you must forsake in coming unto Christ—if His repeated calls have been so unheeded and so withstood by you, that He has at length ceased from striving, then the reason why your sin is unpardonable, is just because you have refused the gospel salvation. The reason why your case is irrecoverable, is just because you have refused the method of recovery so long, and so often, that every call of repentance has now come to play upon you in vain. The reason why you lie under

a guilt that can meet with no forgiveness, is not that one or all of your sins are of a die so deep and so inveterate, that the cleansing power of the Saviour's atonement cannot overmatch them. Let the invitation to the fountain that is opened in the house of Judah, circulate among you as freely as the preacher's voice—for sure we are, that there does not stand, at this moment, within the reach of hearing us, any desperado in vice, so sunk in the depths of his dark and unnatural rebellion, that he is not welcome if he will. But, if ye *will not* come that ye may have life, this is your sin. This is the barrier in the way of your forgiveness. Grant us repentance and faith, and we know not of a single mysterious crime in the whole catalogue of human depravity, that the atoning blood of our Saviour cannot wash away. But withhold from us repentance and faith—let us see the man who stands unrebuked out of his wickedness by all that conscience has reproached him with—unmoved out of the hardness of his unbelief by all that power of tenderness, which should have softened his unrelenting bosom, when told of the Saviour who had poured out His soul unto the death for him—if all this contempt and resistance of his has been so long and so grievously persisted in, that the Spirit has ceased to strive—then, it is not the power of the Gospel that is in fault, but the obstinacy of him who has rejected it. The sufficiency of the Gospel is not detracted from by so much as a jot or a tittle. To this very hour may we proclaim it as the savour of life unto life, to the very worst of sinners who receive it. But if he so turn aside

from its invitations, and the habit be so fixed with him, and conscience get into a state of such immoveable dormancy, that the Spirit gives him over, it is not that the Gospel does not carry a remedy along with it for one and all of his offences, but because he refuses that Gospel, that it is to him the savour of death unto death.

A king publishes a wide and unexcepted amnesty to the people of a rebellious district in his empire, upon the bare act of each presenting himself within a limited period, before an authorised agent, and professing his purposes of future loyalty. Does it at all detract from the clemency of this deed of grace, that many of the rebels feel a strong reluctance to this personal exhibition of themselves; and that the reluctance strengthens and accumulates upon them by every day of their postponement; and that even before the season of mercy has expired, it has risen to such a degree of aversion on their part, as to form a moral barrier in the way of their prescribed return, that is altogether impassable? Will you say, because there is no forgiveness to them, that there is any want of amplitude in that charter of forgiveness which is proclaimed in the hearing of all; or, that pardon has not been provided for every offence, because some offenders are to be found, with such a degree of perverseness and of obstinacy in their bosom, as constrains them to a determined refusal of all pardon?

The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; and there is not a human creature, who let him repent and believe, will ever find the crimson inveteracy

of his manifold offences to be beyond the reach of its purifying and its peace-speaking power. And tell us if it detract by a single iota from the omnipotence of this great Gospel remedy, that there are many sinners in the world who refuse to lay hold of it. To the hour of death it is within the reach of all and of any who will. This is the period in the history of each individual, at which this great act of amnesty expires—and to the last minute of his life, it is competent for me and for every minister of the Gospel to urge it upon him, in all the largeness and in all the universality which belong to it—and to assure him, that there is not a single deed of wickedness with which his faithful memory now agonizes him, not one habit of disobedience that now clothes his retrospect of the past in the sad colouring of despair, all the guilt of which, and all the condemnation of which, the blood of the offered Saviour cannot do away. But, though we may offer, that is not to say that he will accept. Though we may proclaim and urge the proclamation in his hearing, with every tone of truth and of tenderness, that is not to say, that our voice will enter with power, or make its resistless way through those avenues of his heart, where he has done so much to rear a defending barrier, that may prove to be impenetrable. Though there be truth in our every announcement, that is not to say, that the demonstration of the Spirit will accompany it —even that Spirit who long ere now may have left to himself the man, who, his whole life long has grieved and resisted Him. It is still true, that the pardon lies at his acceptance; and it may be

as true, that there can be no pardon to him because he has brought such an inveterate blindness upon his soul, that he will neither receive the truth, nor love it, nor feel those genuine impulses by which it softens the heart of man to repentance. And thus it is, that while the blood of Christ cleanseth the every sin of every believer, the sin against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven, because with this sin, and with its consequences upon him, man wills not, and repents not, and believes not.

And now for the interesting question,—How am I to know that I have committed this sin, that is said to be beyond the reach of forgiveness? We are sure, that the right solution of this question, if well understood, would go to dissipate all that melancholy which has been felt upon the subject, by many a bewildered inquirer. You cannot take a review of the years that are gone, and fetch up this mysterious sin to your remembrance out of the history of the sins that are past. There is not one of them, which, if turned away from, in the faith of that pardon that is through the blood of the atonement, there is not one of them beyond the reach of the great redemption of the Gospel. The sin against the Holy Ghost is not some awful and irrevocable deed, around which a disordered fancy has thrown its superstitious array, and which beams in deeper terror upon the eye of the mind, from the very obscurity by which it is encompassed. There ought to be no darkness and no mystery about it. The sin against the Holy Ghost is such a daring and obstinate rebellion against the prerogatives of conscience—that all its calls to penitency

have been repelled—and all the urgency of its admonitions to flee to the offered Saviour, has been withstood—and all this obstinacy of resistance has been carried forward to such a point in the history of the unhappy man, that his conscience has ceased from the exercise of its functions; and the Holy Spirit has laid down His office of prompting it; and the tenderness of a beseeching God may be sounded in his ear—but unaccompanied as it is by that power which makes a willing and obedient people, it reaches not his sullen and inflexible heart. And instead, therefore, of looking for that sin among those imaginary few who mourn and are in distress, under an overwhelming sense of its enormity, I look for it to those thousands, who, trenched among the secularities of the world, or fully set on the mad career of profligacy, are posting their careless and infatuated way—and suffering Sabbaths and opportunities to pass over them—and turn with contempt from the foolishness of preaching—and hold up the iron front of insensibility against all that is appalling in the judgments of God—and cling to this perishable scene under the most touching experiences of its vanity—and walk their unfaltering path amid all the victims which mortality has strewn around them—and every year drink deeper into the spirit of the world—till the moral disease rises to such an inveteracy, that all the engines of conversion, unaided, as they are, by that peculiar force and demonstration which is from on high, fall powerless as infancy upon them, and every soul amongst them sunk in torpor im-

moveable, will never, never, be made to know the power and the life of a spiritual resurrection.

We know nothing that goes farther to nullify the Bible, than the habit of subjecting the interpretation of its passages to any other principle, than that all its parts must consist and be in harmony with each other. There has a world of mischief been done by the modifications that have been laid on the obvious meaning of Scripture, with the purpose of rendering it more palatable to our independent views of what is right, and wise, and reasonable. This, in fact, is deposing the word of God from that primitive authority which belongs to it, as the court of highest appeal—all whose decisions are final and irreversible. Grant us that there is no contradiction between what we find in the book of God's counsel, and what we know by the evidence of our own experience, or the overbearing testimony of others—and such we hold to be the ignorance of man about the whole of that spiritual and unseen world which lies beyond the circle of his own observation, that we count it not merely his most becoming piety, but we count it also his soundest and most enlightened philosophy, to sit down with the docility of a little child to all that is intimated and made known to him by a well-attested revelation. After the deductions we have just now made, we know of no other principle on which we should ever offer to modify a verse or a clause of the written record; but the principle of that entire consistency which must reign throughout all its communications. We know of no other cross-examination which we have a right to set up

on this witness to the invisible things of faith—than to try it by itself, and to condemn it, if possible, out of its own mouth, by confronting together its own depositions. We are only at freedom to sustain or to qualify the literal sense of one of its announcements, by the literal and equally authoritative sense of some other of its announcements. And such is our respect for the paramount authority of Scripture, that we know of no discovery more pleasing, than that by which the apparent inconsistency between two places, is so cleared up, that all necessity for encroaching upon the literal sense of either of them is completely done away—for it goes to establish our every impression of the unviolable sanctity of its various communications, and to heighten our belief that every semblance of opposition between the particulars of the divine testimony, exists not in the testimony itself, but in the misapprehension of our own dark and imperfect understandings.

Now, if you look to the 31st verse of the 12th chapter of Matthew, you will perceive, that all who think the sin against the Holy Ghost to lie in the commission of some rare and monstrous, but at the same time specific iniquity, cannot admit the first clause of the verse without qualifying it by some of the undeniable doctrines of the New Testament. They would say, it is not true that all manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men, with the exception of this blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which they conceive to occur but seldom in the history of human wickedness. They would say, that there is forgiveness to no sin whatever

but on the faith and the repentance of him who has incurred it—and we must, therefore, suppose this, and qualify the clause by this indispensable condition, and thus make the clause to tell us, how such is the power of the Gospel, that all the sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven of those who have embraced it—save that one sin against the Holy Ghost, for the remission of which not even their acceptance of the Gospel of Christ could avail them.

Now, the explanation we have given of this sin renders all this work of annexing terms and modifications to this verse of the Bible unnecessary, and gives, we think, even to its literal and unrestricted meaning, a most lucid consistency with all that is leading and that is undeniable in the doctrine of the New Testament. If the sin against the Holy Ghost be just that sin, in virtue of which the calls and offers of the Gospel are so rejected, as to be finally and irreversibly put away from us, then it is true, it is absolutely and unreservedly true, that all other manner of sin shall be forgiven but this one only. All who so reject this Gospel, have sinned against the Holy Ghost—and none who accept this Gospel have incurred this sin, nor shall they want the forgiveness that is there provided for them. It is quite in vain to think, that the sin against the Holy Ghost is confined to that period of the world, at which our Saviour made His personal appearance in it. The truth is, that it is since Christ withdrew from the world, that He now carries forward by the Spirit, as his agent and substitute, the business of pressing home upon

men the acceptance of the Gospel, by working with their consciences. He employs the Spirit as His witness, since He Himself has gone away from us; and as in the business of entertaining the calls and the offers of the New Testament, our doings are more exclusively with this Spirit, and not at all with the Saviour Himself personally, we are surely as much in the way now of committing the sin in question, as in those days when the Holy Ghost was not so abundantly given, because Jesus Christ was not then glorified. All those, be assured, who refuse the Gospel now, do so because they refuse the testimony of this witness—do so because they stifle within them the urgency of His rebuke, when He tells them of faith and of repentance—do so, when He offers to convince them on principles, that would be clear to themselves, could they only be so far arrested by the imperious claims of God and of eternity, as attend to them; convince them that they are indeed on a way of guilt and of alienation, which, if not turned from, through the revealed Mediator, will land them in the condemnation of a most righteous and unmitigable law. And thus, in the day of reckoning, will this verse, in its most plain and obvious literality, be so accomplished on the hosts who are assembled round the judgment-seat—that all who are free from this sin shall have their every other sin forgiven, just because they have obeyed the Gospel in embracing the overtures of forgiveness—and that all who, on that day, shall find no escape, and no forgiveness, have this doom laid upon them, just because each, without exception,

has incurred the sin to which no forgiveness is awarded, by the very act of neglecting the great salvation.

The sin then against the Holy Ghost, so far from conferring any rare distinction of wickedness on him who is guilty of it, is, in fact, the sin of all who, living under the dispensation of the Gospel, have, by their rejection of it, made it the "savour of death unto death." It is a sin which can be charged upon every man who has put the overtures of forgiveness away from him. It is a sin which if, on the great day of examination, you are found to be free from, will argue your acceptance of the Gospel, in virtue of which its forgiveness is made sure to you. And it is a sin, which, if found on that day to adhere to you, will argue your final refusal of this same Gospel, in virtue of which your forgiveness is impossible—because you are out of the only way given under heaven whereby men can be saved. So that this sin, looked upon by many as the sin of one particular age, or, if possible to realise it in the present day, as only to be met with in a few solitary instances of enormous and unexpiable transgression, is the very sin upon which may be made to turn the condemnation and the ruin of the existing majority of our species.

Before we are done with this subject, there is one question that remains to be disposed of. Does it appear, from the historical circumstances of the case, that that conduct of the Pharisees which called forth from our Saviour the denunciation of the text, bears a resemblance to the account we have given of the sin against the Holy Ghost, as

exemplified by the men of the present generation? In their rejecting of Christ, was there a determined rebellion of purpose against the light of their own conscience? Was there a wilful and resolved suppression of the force of evidence? Was there a habitual stifling within them of the movement and the impulse of moral principle? Was there a firm and deliberate posting of themselves on the ground of opposition, in the whole of their past resistance to this Jesus of Nazareth? Was there an obstinate keeping of this ground? Was there an audacious and desperate intent of holding out against all that could be offered in the shape of proofs or of remonstrances on the side of Christianity? Was there a voluntary darkening, on their part, of the light of truth, when it began to dawn upon their souls, and threatened to carry their convictions away from them? Was there a habit of fetching up, at all hazards, every argument, however false and however blasphemous it may be, on which they might rest the measures of a proud and interested party, and thus might give the shape and the colour of plausibility to that systematic opposition they had entered on?

It strikes us, that the whole history of the Pharisees in the New Testament, holds them out in the very attitude of mind which we have now described to you. And think you not that, in the work of maintaining this attitude against the warfare of all that moral and miraculous argument which was brought to bear upon them, they never smothered the instigations of conscience, and through it rebelled against that Spirit, who conveyed, by

this organ of the inner man, the whispers of His still but impressive voice? "Which of you convinceth me of sin," says the Saviour, "and if I tell you the truth, why do you not believe me?" Did conscience never tell them how impossible it was that Jesus of Nazareth could lie? Did not the words of Him who spake as never man spake, bear upon them the impress of truth as well as of dignity? Is there not such a thing as the suspicious aspect of an impostor, and is there not also such a thing as the open, the declared, the ingenuous, and altogether overbearing aspect of integrity—and is it not conceivable, how, in this way, the words of the Saviour might have carried such a moral evidence along with them, as to stamp an unquestionable character on all His attestations? Now, was there no resisting of the Holy Spirit, in the act of shutting the eye of the judgment against the whole weight and authority of this character? In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the men of that day were honoured with the singular privilege of beholding God manifest in the flesh—of seeing all the graces of the Holy Spirit substantiated, without one taint of imperfection, on the life and character of one who wore the form of the species—of witnessing, if we may so express ourselves, a sensible exhibition of the Godhead—of hearing the truth of God fall in human utterance upon their ears, with a tone of inimitable candour—of seeing the earnest longing of God after the creatures He had formed, stamped in living and undeniable traces upon a human countenance—of beholding the tenderness of God expressed in human tears, by Him who wept

over the sins and the sufferings of mankind—and all the goodness of Deity distinctly announcing itself in the mild and impressive sympathies of a human voice. Think you not that there was no struggling with their own consciences, and no wilful blinding of their own hearts, on the part of those by whom such an exhibition was resisted? Surely, surely, the Spirit of God did much to subdue their acquiescence in the alone way of salvation —when all His fruits and all His accomplishments were gathered upon the person of the Redeemer into one visible assemblage—when the whole force of this moral ascendancy was made so nearly and so repeatedly to bear upon them—when truth, with all its pleading energy, assailed them—and gentleness tried to win them over to the cause of their own eternity—and the soft eye of compassion beamed upon them—and the unwearied forbearance, which no weight of personal injustice could overcome, told them how, for their sakes, Jesus of Nazareth was ready to do all and to suffer all—and patience, even unto martyrdom, left a meek, but a firm testimony behind it. O! think you not, that in the perverse representations, and the spiteful malignity, and the sullen immoveable hardness, by which all this was withstood and overborne, there was such an outrage upon the authority of conscience, and such a dark and determined principle of rebellion against Him who prompts it with all its instigations, as by provoking Him to cast them off from all His further communications, might raise an eternal barrier against that faith, and that repentance, and that obedience to the Gospel of

Christ, through which alone forgiveness is extended to a guilty world?

To aggravate still further this resistance to the moral claims of the Saviour, on the part of His inflexible enemies, let us see how these very claims told on the consciences of other men. The officers whom they sent to apprehend Him, when they went faltered from the purpose, at what they saw and heard—and when they returned with their errand unfulfilled, and the answer in their mouth, that "surely never man spake like this man," they found the masters they had to deal with were made of sterner materials—men who knew not what it was to falter—men who reproached them for their moral sensibility—and who had sternly resolved, at all hazards, and in defiance to all principle, to rid themselves of this dangerous pretender. Again, when they instigated Pilate to a capital sentence against Him, the Roman Governor was shaken by all that he observed of this innocent victim—but look all the while at the unrelenting constancy with which they kept by their purpose; and in the barbarous prosecution of it, schooled the governor out of his difficulties; and raised the frenzy of the populace; and surrounded the best and kindest of the species with the scowl of a brutal and reviling multitude. And, lastly, when He had sealed His testimony by His blood, mark how the man who presided over the execution, was overpowered into the acknowledgment, that "Surely this was the Son of God;" and how they, unsoftened and unsubdued, stood fast to their object—and got His body to be watched, and a story to be devised, and

a falsehood of deliberate manufacture to be thrown afloat, with which they might stem the growing faith of our Saviour's resurrection. Now, in this difference between the resolved and inflexible hatred of the Jewish persecutors of Christ, and the relentings of other men, do you see no suppression of the voice of conscience—in this resistance to that light of principle which sends forth an occasional gleam over the path of the determinedly reprobate, do you see no one of those ingredients which give to the sin against the Holy Ghost all the malignancy that belongs to it? Or, rather, in this hard and unmoveable hostility against one whose challenge to convince Him of sin, they dared not to entertain; against one, of whom they could not fail to perceive, that He was the mildest, and the sincerest, and the most unoffending, and the most unwearied in well-doing of all the characters that had met their observation, do you not perceive how it was in the cause of their own offended pride, and their own threatened interest, that they made their systematic resistance to every moral argument, and hurried away their minds from every painful remonstrance—and that too, in the very style in which the obstinately impenitent of the day do, in resistance to every demonstration of guilt, and to every warning of danger, walk in the counsel of their own hearts, and in the sight of their own eyes?

It is very true, that it was upon an outward act of speaking, on the part of the Pharisees, that our Saviour uttered this remarkable denunciation. But remember what He says Himself upon this

subject—how the things which come out of a man are evil, because they are the products of a heart which is evil. Remember what is said a few verses before—how our Saviour, who knew what was in man, knew the thoughts of those Pharisees; and it is upon His knowledge of their thoughts, that He ascribed such a malignity, and laid such a weight of condemnation on the words which conveyed them. Remember what is said a few verses after, where the fruit is represented as bad, just because the tree is bad—where the words have their whole character of evil imparted to them, just because it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh, and out of the evil humours of the heart, that the man bringeth forth evil things. And surely, when, after our Saviour had uttered such a peculiar sentence of condemnation on the sin against the Holy Ghost, He expressly connects the words of the mouth, with the disposition of the heart, ere He tells us that it was by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned—we ought no longer to do what we are sure is done by many in their obscure imaginations upon this subject, we ought not to liken the sin against the Holy Ghost to the spell of some magical incantation, deriving the whole of that deadly taint which belongs to it, from some infernal charm with which the utterance of mere language is darkly and unaccountably impregnated. But knowing that every denunciation of our great spiritual Teacher, had some clear and unchangeable principle of morality to rest upon—and perceiving, as we do, that on this very occasion

He refers us to the disposition of the heart, as that which gives to the utterance of the tongue all its malignity, let us, when reading of this desperate guilt of the Pharisees, look to the spirit and moral temper of the Pharisees, and, if possible, gather a something that may carry to our own bosoms a salutary and convincing application.

And a single glance at the circumstances may be enough to satisfy us, that never, in any one recorded passage of their history, did they evince the bent of so inflexible a determination against the authority of conscience—never such a wilful darkening of their own hearts against the light and the power of evidence, as in the passage that is now before us. The whole weight of that moral argument on which we have already expatiated, was reinforced by a miracle so striking and so palpable in its effects, that all the people were thrown into amazement. But what constituted the peculiarity of the miracle was, that it was just such a miracle as the Pharisees themselves had been accustomed to look upon with veneration, and had viewed as an example of successful hostility against the empire of darkness. They had faith in these possessions. They counted every one of them to be the work of Beelzebub, and the casting out of any of them as a direct triumph of warfare against the prince of the devils. They themselves, it would appear, laid claim to the power of dispossessing these demons; and we have no doubt that the imagination of such a power residing with them and their children, or proselytes, would help to give them that prophetical sanctity in the eyes of the

common people, which they so much aspired after. But when the very thing on which they tried to strengthen their own claims to authority, was done by that man, the progress of whose authority among his countrymen, they were determined, at all hazards, to arrest; they went round the whole compass of their principles, and suppressed the voice of every one of them, rather than own the hand of God, or submit to the demonstration of His power in the miracle before them. It was indeed a desperate fetch that they made for an argument, when the very work in which they gloried, and on which they founded the credit of their own order, was so maligned and misrepresented by them. They had ever been in the habit of ascribing the possessions of that age to the power of Beelzebub—and now to give a colour to their hatred of Jesus and His claims, they suppose the house of Beelzebub to be divided against itself, and they ascribe to His power a miracle, the doing of which went to dispossess Him of a part of His empire. They pretended that their sons or their proselytes had the power of casting out those possessions, and never failed to ascribe this power to the Spirit and the countenance of God—but now they turned round upon the matter, and by rearing their argument against the Saviour in the direct face of their own principle, did they prove how firmly they were resolved to lay hold of an anything, rather than admit the claims of one who was so offensive to them. Thus did they give, perhaps, at this moment, a more conspicuous evidence than they had ever done before, how every

proof and every remonstrance would all be wasted upon them. The Spirit of God had gone his uttermost length with them; and on abandoning them for ever, He left behind Him their blood upon their own head, and the misery of an irrecoverable condition, that was of their own bringing on. He had long borne with them—and it will be seen in the day of reckoning, when all mysteries are cleared up, how great the patience, and the kindness, and the unwearied perseverance were which they had resisted. For though the Spirit strives long, He does not strive always; and they brought on this crisis in their history, just by the very steps in which every impenitent man brings it on in the present day, by a wilful resistance to the light of their own understanding; by a resolute suppression of the voice of their own conscience.

But we must bring all these explanations to a close. The distinction between speaking against the Son of man, and speaking against the Holy Ghost, may be illustrated by what He says of the difference between bearing witness of Himself, and another bearing witness of Him. If He had had no other testimony than His own to offer, they had not had sin. If He had not done the works before them which none other man did, and which no mere son of man could do, they had not had sin. If He had had nothing to show on which to sustain the character that signalized Him above the mere children of men, their resistance could have been forgiven—but He had shown the most abundant evidence on this point—He had just performed a deed which their every habit, and their every con-

ception, led them to ascribe to the Spirit and the power of God—He had brought forward what to their own judgments, was the testimony of the Spirit, and they resisted it. It was no longer now an opposition to man, and a railing of man, and a contemptuous negligence of man—all this is sinful; but it was not that which blocked up the way against the remission of sin—it was when they reviled Him who offered to lead them on in that way, that they were ever strengthening the barrier which lay across the path of acceptance. While the last and most conclusive proof that would be given of Jesus having indeed the seal and the commission of the Spirit upon Him, was not yet tried, and found ineffectual—all their opposition to Him still partook of opposition to one of whom the most decisive evidence that he was any thing more than the Son of man, was still in reserve. It still partook of opposition to a fellow-man. But when that decisive evidence was at length offered, and the Spirit interposed with His last and greatest attempt to vindicate His own seal, and to authenticate His own commission on the person of Jesus of Nazareth —then that which was before the speaking evil of the Son of man, became the speaking evil of the Son of God; and that, aggravated to the uttermost length that it now would be permitted to go. And the Pharisees, by smothering the light of all that evidence which the Holy Spirit had brought forward, both in the miracles that were done, and in the graces of that sinless example which was set so impressively before them, had, by that time, raised in their hearts such an entrenchment of

prejudice against the faith of the Gospel, and so discouraged the Holy Spirit from any farther attempt to scale and to surmount it, that all recovery was hopeless, and all forgiveness was impossible.

SERMON X.

ON THE SPIRIT'S STRIVING WITH MAN.

"And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man."
—GEN. vi. 3.

WHEN man is prevailed on to follow the call of the Gospel, he does it on the impulse of certain considerations. Interest, for example, may have some share in moving him to this step; but this it could not have, unless he saw his interest to be involved in it—or, in other words, unless he believed in the unseen matters of a judgment and an eternity. Duty may have some share in moving him; but this it could not have, unless he was visited with a relenting sense of his obligation to that God, whose will he had so often forgotten, and whose requirements he had so often trampled on—or, in other words, unless the conscience were made more tender, and the heart of stone were made more soft and susceptible than it ever had been, up to the decisive moment of his embarking his every desire and his every purpose, on that path of obedience which leads to the Jerusalem above. Now it is to be remarked, that all the considerations both of duty and of interest might be presented to a multitude of people in the same language, with the same impressiveness of tone and of vehement affection on the part of the speaker, and

with all the same external advantages on the part of the hearer; and yet, in point of fact, there is not a more familiar exhibition of human nature, than that the movement of the very same engine should carry along with it a prevailing influence on certain individuals of this multitude, while with certain others, the influence felt at the time and acted on for the time, is at length lost and overborne amongst the concerns of the world, and the urgency of its manifold temptations.

Now there must be a cause for this difference; and it is not enough, to assign as the cause the mere variety of original character and constitution among those, who are within the reach of a hearing. There can be no doubt that this has an effect; but still the effect is not such as may not be completely overruled, by a cause that is paramount to all the previous varieties of character whatever, and a cause that can get the better of all the resistance which the hardiest and the worldliest of minds may offer to the power of that truth which is brought to bear upon it. There are repeated instances, in the history of the church, of the unlikeliest and most stubborn of men, surrendering themselves to the power of a gospel argument, which has fallen on the conscience of one who had apparently a more impressible constitution, without fruit and without efficacy. And to suspend you no longer on this topic, we give it you as one of the clearest announcements of Scripture—that while, in the administration of Heaven's kingdom upon earth, the bible, and the minister, and the various ordinances of religion, are set

agoing as so many visible instruments for turning man from the power of Satan unto God—it is that spirit which bloweth where He listeth, who gives to these instruments all their success, and all their energy. And, without stopping at present to resolve all the interesting questions which follow in the train of this most important doctrine, we feel, that we are only uttering the words of God's own authoritative revelation, when we say, that, wherever an impression is kindled in a human bosom on the side of what is right, or penitent, or pious, there, through the medium of some secondary cause or other, the Spirit of God has been at work. And in every movement of conscience, in every pang of self-reproach, in every visitation of a compunctious tenderness, in every conception of a better purpose, in every longing of the soul after a conformity to the law of heaven, in every upward aspiring of the heart under all the darkness and all the passion by which it is encompassed, do we recognize a manifestation of the Spirit's influence, a trace of His unseen but most undoubted agency, a struggle in that contest which is now going on between the powers of heaven and of hell for the dominion of this world; and upon the issue of which contest in the soul of each individual it will depend, whether he remain in captivity to the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; or renewed in his mind by the power of the Holy Ghost, he be rescued from that universal wreck which has come upon the species, and be exalted into a monument of that Redeemer's triumphs who has undertaken the work of our deliverance, and, for

that greatness of strength which He put forth is the execution of it, has obtained for His reward that He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

Now it may require some attention from you, to perceive the precise kind of responsibility, which this view of the matter lays on one and on all of us. Were a charge committed to me by some rightful superior in an unknown tongue, I incur no fault towards him, though I fail to acquit myself of the articles of this charge. But conceive an interpreter to step in between me and him, and to translate the whole of his instructions into my vernacular language; and then should I persist in my neglect, I land myself in all the guilt of disobedience. Or, what brings it still nearer to the topic on hand, conceive me to be labouring under such a deafness, that I cannot possibly hear the feeble voice of my master, as he delivers his commission to me; but that I am able to understand it by the more powerful enunciation of a third person, who acts as an assistant in this business of communication betwixt us. Or, what perhaps is a still more precise approximation, conceive me to be ignorant of the authority and blind to the claims of him who is laying his commands upon me; but that another explains the matter so as to make me sensible of his moral and legitimate right to the whole of my obedience. Then you can be at no loss to feel, how, whatever palliations might be devised for my want of subordination to the will of my superior, had there been no intermediate link of interpretation, or

of exposition, or of audible conveyance betwixt us—yet, with such a link, every such palliation is done away; and the more faithfully and laboriously and patiently the office of an interpreter has been discharged, the more does it go to aggravate the blame of him, who, with all these advantages, still refuses the rightful call of his rightful superior, and turns in contempt and disobedience away from him.

Now it would suspend our immediate object, did we attempt at present what we think can be done by the united force of reason and Scripture, to pour the light of a thorough explicitness into all the subtleties of this interesting argument. We will not therefore say at present, in how far man, because labouring as he does under a moral blindness of perception, and sunk in all the stupidity of a constitutional alienation from God, is, on that account, to be held less guilty of rebellion against Him by his life of prone and habitual disobedience. But, sure we are, that it would take away from the whole force of the apology, were some secret and invisible power to open at times the eye of his mind to the high titles and authority of the Godhead; and he with his eyes so open, to put his daring footstep on that forbidden ground which is fenced about by the prohibitions of the Divine law. Or, were this power to touch his heart by some sense of dutiful obligation to his Maker; and he, stifling the whole of its urgency, were to forbear an entrance upon the way of the commandments. Or were this power to lay before him in clear and resistless manifestation the spectacle

of an inviting God, plying His wandering prodigal with all the tenderness of entreaty, and assuring him on the pledge of His own Son given up to the death for us, that if he turn in repentance to the God he has strayed from, all will be forgiven and all will be forgotten; and he, unmoved out of his obstinacy by the whole weight of this fatherly expostulation, were to refuse the proffered kindness, and unmindful of the call from heaven, were to walk in the counsel of his own heart and in the sight of his own eyes. Now there is such a power at work with us all. We see Him not, but we have the experience of His agency in the effect it has on our hearts and consciences. This is the only way in which His interference may have been at all sensible to you—even by a movement of conscience, when it pointed to you the path of duty, or charged on you the guilt of your manifold deviations. All of you must have the remembrance of such movements. There is not one of you, who has not felt in your past history, a visitation of this kind on your ever busy and ever thinking spirits. And there is not one of you who has been in the habit of resisting these visitations, who does not feel, how, in the progress of this resistance, the moral sense gets more languid in its admonitions; and the monitor within emits a gentler voice; and the impression of the present guilt and the future danger is ever decaying into a fainter and a feebler influence; and that horror at sin, which was fresh and powerful at the outset of life, is subsiding into a hardened insensibility; and, for the tenderness of youthful conscience, and youthful appre-

hension, there is now perhaps the front of an audacious rebellion—an iron remorselessness of soul which can now sin for itself without a sigh, and behold the sin of others without one movement of concern or of sympathy. Now if you look no farther than to the phenomenon of conscience within you, you will look on this as the natural progress of its hardening; and on this progress, an argument may be founded for immediate repentance. But the Bible teaches us to look farther. It connects every phenomenon both of matter and of mind, with the invisible power which gives birth to it. It refers every moral movement towards God in the heart of man, to the visitation of God's Spirit, acting the part of an enlightener or adviser or persuasive monitor, who plies His suggestions and His arguments with the men of a perverse and obstinate generation. And thus it is that we are called to grieve not the Spirit, to quench not the Spirit, to provoke not the Spirit to abandon us to our own wilfulness, to make not the Spirit angry by our contempt for His warnings and our resistance to the voice of His authority. It is alarming indeed, to be told of the natural progress of the conscience, in becoming hardier and more insensible by every act of resistance to its dictates. But it forms a distinct and a powerful addition to the argument, when we think of these dictates being set forth by the Spirit of God, who is a willing and a knowing and a living and a personal agent; that we by our resistance tire His patience, and tempt Him to leave us to ourselves, and bring hardness down upon our hearts

in the way of a judgment; that if to day we hear not His voice He may not come to-morrow, or if He do come may knock more deafly than ever at the door of our hearts, and emit a fainter and a feebler whispering; that if now we mind not the things which belong to our peace, He will become less loud and less frequent in His admonitions, He will gradually die away from us into a final departure, He will let us alone, and leave us to the perverseness of our own ways and the infatuation of our own counsels.

The first argument for immediate repentance turns upon the fact, that the soul by every fresh act of resistance against the admonitions of conscience, gathers the metal of a stouter and a hardier resistance in all time coming. The second argument turns upon the fact that the conscience itself is every day becoming less powerful, and less frequent, and less urgent in its admonitions; and if you connect these admonitions with the living and the personal agent, who, by whispering to the human mind through the organ of conscience, is the real though unseen author of all its suggestions—you bring every individual amongst us into the same relation with the Spirit of God, that subsists between him who lies under certain duties and obligations, and him who fulfils the office of his friendly and advising superior. The Spirit takes upon Himself the office of persuading us to all that is most righteous towards God, and of course to all that is most beneficial to ourselves. In the discharge of this office, there is the exercise of much kindness and patience and tender benevo-

lence. If we act faithfully and zealously on the advice of this day, He will treat us as hopeful subjects for the advice of another day. He will persevere in His services, and reiterate His admonitions; and to us who have made a right use of the teaching we have received, more will be given. And this harmonizes with all that we experience of the visible effect of this invisible influence. He who betakes himself most scrupulously to the following of his conscience, is every day receiving from it the light of clearer and more abundant intimations. The monitor within becomes every day, by reason of use, more judicious and enlightened; and more able to indicate the path of duty, and to lead us a clear and a confident way through all the embarrassments of a darkening casuistry; and, in return as it were for our faithful application of its more elementary lessons, does it deal them out in larger and surer and more abundant manifestations. The conscientious performance of what we do know, is rewarded by a more satisfying revelation of what we do not know. And thus it is, that we so often behold the progress of a true believer, to be from the fearful scrupulosities of a yet unsettled and unconfirmed babe in Christ, to that firm purpose, that intrepid decision, that bold and immediate energy of conduct, which bespeak the full assurance of a mind that knoweth the right from the wrong, and promptly betakes itself to the line of its own just and righteous determination. If any man keep my sayings to him will I manifest myself. If any man serve me, he shall not walk in darkness but shall have the

light of life. These and such as these are most interesting passages. They unfold the connexion which the Author of the Gospel has established, between advancing obedience and advancing spiritual discernment. Follow out the dictates that have already been clearly put forth to you; and this will be followed up by a more copious supply of instruction than you have ever yet received. Walk after the present leadings of your conscience, or rather of the Spirit to whom conscience is the organ or channel of conveyance; and He will lead you still farther: And thus it is, that you grow from the first rudiments of the Christian practice, to the strength and the stature of manhood; and are carried forward from the tottering feebleness of one who is in the infancy of his acquirements, till you are made to stand perfect and complete in the whole will of God.

Now mark the opposite result of that conduct, by which we turn a deaf ear to the voice that is within us. We not only disobey the voice, but we stifle it. In the whole of this business we have to do with one who is pleased with our attention to Him, and rewards it by the growing clearness and frequency of His intimations. But should we withhold our attention, He in time will withhold His intimations. My Spirit will not always strive with the children of men. It is thus it will be found in the great day of account that He is clear of the blood of all the families upon earth. It will be found that over the whole face of an alienated world, deep as its spirit of slumber may be about the things of God, it will be found that He has

done enough to awaken it. It will be found, that, with the mighty instruments of the law written in the heart and the law written in the record of heaven's messengers, He has made His ample round through all the tribes of this world's accountable population, and has knocked at the door of every conscience; and there is not a man who will have Him to blame for the undoing of his eternity. He has given to each some distinct suggestion or other, which he himself felt to be invested with all the authority of a rightful command; and which, had he followed, the spirit of God would still have kept by him and plied him with his further communications. But he did not follow it, clear as it was even to his own sense of right and wrong; and therefore it is, that on that great and decisive day, his condemnation will have a clear principle to rest upon. He will be tried by the light that was put within his reach, and which was withdrawn from him only because he had not the uprightness and the morality to walk in it; and therefore it is that in him is fulfilled the saying, that he who hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath. And thus it is, that every act of known and wilful disobedience, throws a darkening cloud over the path of duty; and smothers the admonitions of the inward voice; and makes the Spirit of God less frequent in His visitations; and hastens to the soul that awful consummation of being let alone, or of being finally abandoned to its own desperate impenitency. And therefore do we urge you to follow out every one step and purpose of repentance that conscience is now laying upon you; and that

not merely because we anticipate in future a hardier resistance to its dictates, but we anticipate the progressive feebleness of a decaying and perhaps of an expiring conscience. Or, in other words we know that He who suggests to it all its admonitions, and arms its voice with all the energy that belongs to it, may at length be driven by your perverse and ungracious treatment of Him to abandon His office altogether, and to leave the chamber of that mind where sin reigns uncontrolled and fills the recesses of the inner man with its dark and unhallowed imagery,—leave it with all its rebellious affections unrebuked by His presence and unblest by any of His future visitations.

This is not an aerial speculation. What we have now asserted may be seen by us all, fixed and exemplified on many a living subject. There are men to be met with at all times, crossing our daily path, and sitting down with us in the social party, and entering into talk with us in the room of public resort and into negotiation with us at the market-place—who are just in that very state of abandonment which we have now been describing. You may not have been in the habit of looking upon them, as men of whom you could say, that the Spirit of God had given them over. But this is only because you have not adverted to the fact—that it is this Spirit who is the real, though secret and unnoticed author, of every movement of principle; of every suggestion of conscience; of every check of self-reproach; of every arresting call, by which the mind is directed to seriousness, and is led to bethink itself of God,

and is visited by a sense of the present guilt and the coming judgment, and is in any way brought under the power of a religious consideration. We are sure, you must allow, that there is not a more familiar exhibition amongst your fellow-men, than of one who is built up in an ease and in a security, to which the monitor within offers no disturbance whatever—of one who does, and is in the deliberate habit of doing, what is clearly and undeniably wrong; but whose conscience has ceased to ply him with her remonstrances, and to tell him that it is so—of one, who, in the pursuits of voluptuousness, suffers not one thought of the law of heaven, to stop him in that unhallowed career on which he has embarked himself—of one, who, in the prosecution of gain, can do things without one check of remorse, which other men could not do, without their inner man bringing the whole armour of principle and of compunction and a struggling sense of duty into war against it. You must in your walk of experience have met with such men—whose conscience is asleep, or whose conscience has lost its power of admonition; or whose conscience, at least, has given up her wonted task, of presenting her admonitions to the notice of the infatuated profligate, or of the corrupt and devoted worldling. And if you just connect this fact, offered to you by your own experience, with the undoubted truth—that this said conscience is neither more nor less than the organ, through which the Spirit of God sends His impressive whispers into the soul; and plies it with the awful lessons, of man being answerable to his God, and of God's

wrath being revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of man—Then the right inference to make concerning him who hears no such whispers, is, that the Spirit of God is no longer at work with him. He no longer offers to move him out of the fatal tranquillity which has got hold of him. And that soul which is enjoying itself for a few years—which feels so much at ease, because leaning on a foundation of repose that never varies—which goes on to sin without one disquieting scruple; and to keep by its distance from God without one terrifying thought of His unescapable eye, and His no less unescapable judgment—Why such a soul, surrounded as it may be with all the securities of unconcern, and of worldly pleasure, and of prosperous circumstances, and of health which bids fair for a long vista and a brilliant perspective on this side of eternity—such a soul, with all its enviable tranquillities, and all its keen enjoyment of time and of its vanities, is neither more nor less than ripening for its doom, in the deceitful calm of a deep and undisturbed infatuation. And, however much the easy man may be the object of complacency to himself and of convivial delight to his acquaintances who are like him—on him lies the awful sentence of being let alone; of being given up by the Spirit of God; of being turned from as one of those hopeless subjects, on whom all the past suggestions of conscience and of principle have been thrown away; of being left to the deep spirit of slumber, in which he may persist to the hour of death, and from which he may never never be awakened, till the sound of the last trumpet

shall summon him from the grave—and the awful infliction of his now heedless and thoughtless and remorseless guilt, shall frown upon him in fell characters of truth and of severity from the judgment-seat.

But, it may be said, does not this treatment of him by the Spirit of God look hard and unrelenting? Would it not be kind to keep by him, and to remonstrate with him, and to send another and another suggestion through the conscience of this poor child of infatuation? Yes, but ere we indulge in these reflections, let us think what the Spirit of God has already done for him. We appeal to his own remembrance, if any such be here, whether the Spirit of God have not already done all this? We call him to look back on his youthful days, and bid him recollect, if there never was a time in the whole history of his life, when conscience awoke upon him, when, ere he entered that career of guilt on which he is now so fully embarked, if the internal monitor, true to her office, did not struggle the point with him; and he, suffering himself to be overborne by temptations, would none of her reproof, and turned away from all her admonitions? We ask him to tell us upon his own honest remembrance of the past, if, even after he had been led astray among the dark paths of this world's deceit and this world's profligacy, conscience still did not keep for months and for years by her post, and ever and anon plied him with her visitations? We ask him, if she did not fill her mouth with arguments, and make use of every plea to recal her thankless disciple, from

the profanations and the depravities into which he was wandering? Was there never a time when she pressed him with her suggestions; and he, shutting the hasty door against them all, took shelter in the surrounding example, and quelled his every agitation amid the boisterous merriment of his still hardier acquaintances? Yes, if he will only look back, he will find that it was long and very long, ere conscience gave way to his repeated insults, and was at length compelled to quit him under the power of his manifold and provoking contempt for her. And ere she could resign her task, did she borrow suggestions from every quarter, and try her every expedient, and waited her every moment, and bethink herself of a variety of affecting considerations. She would at one time fetch an argument from heaven; and tell him of the God who sitteth on the throne, and of the law that proceedeth out of His mouth, and of the all-seeing eye that is in every place beholding the evil and the good. At another, she would fetch her argument from earth, and, to subdue him into tenderness would she set before him the picture of a venerable father; and of the mansions of piety, where he spent his early days, and would have shrunk in horror from the thought of his present delinquencies; and of the prayers which his unsuspecting parents are still putting forth for him; and of the thankless return, he has made them for all their anxieties; and how, dismantled of all his youthful innocence, and with all purity fled from his practice and all tenderness from his heart, he was widening every day his distance from that

God, at whose word he had been taught to tremble, and whose sabbaths he had been taught to remember and to keep them holy. But why need we talk of his conscience, when in fact it was the pure and the Holy Spirit of God, who prompted her every admonition, and gave its emphasis to every lifting of her voice. This Spirit kept by him; and gave him the fairest and most frequent trials; and, grieved though He was by the bitterest provocations did not for long abandon him; and went along with him to those haunts of iniquity, where pure as He was, He had to bear with all the impurities and all the execrations which are acted in these scenes of wickedness, and even then did He attempt to reclaim him to seriousness: But all, all was stifled; and after a patience exercised to the uttermost—after the discouragement of many refusals—after being quenched and resisted in many thousand ways—then and not till then did the Holy Spirit of God, against whom he is now venting forth his murmurs of discontent, abandon him to his own infatuation.

And even still, if there be any individual of the description we allude to within the reach of our hearing, and whose conscience has been at all touched, or his feelings at all arrested, by the instrumentality of our feeble voice—then there has been another agent between him and us, than the mere sound by which the words of truth are conveyed to his hearing. The Spirit of God has lent His presence to the sound. And after the long and dreary absence of those years which have been spent at a distance from all that was

serious in principle, and all that was pure and righteous in conduct, has He now come back upon him; and made another reappearance; and given him another sight of His rebuking countenance; and is making another trial to find a way into his bosom: and forgetful of every provocation, and of every wrong that He has gotten from his hands, is He telling him that here is another opportunity; and lifting His friendly countenance, that, if possible, He may still restrain him from the fate of a desperado in rebellious iniquity against God. He is pointing to him, on the one hand, the terrors of that sentence which is awaiting him, if he will turn him away from the reproof that He is now laying upon his conscience; and, on the other, He is trying to lure him to his safety, by holding forth to the eye of his mind the arms of an inviting lawgiver, who, even in this late hour of his dark and deceitful day, still says, That if he will only return to Him and make his peace with Him through the blood of an everlasting covenant, and be willing to live no longer to himself but to the new law of Him who has taken upon Him the burden of his iniquities—that He is willing to forgive all and to forget all. If any thing will touch the heart of him who has driven at a long career of hard and obstinate impenitency, this should. And if it do not, who does not see that God has wiped His hands of him? Who does not see, that He who sitteth on the throne, and has plied him through life with so many warnings of proclaimed danger and so many messages of insulted tenderness, has acquitted Himself of all harsh and

unrighteous severity? Who does not see, that the blood lieth on the head of him who has thus abandoned himself; and that it is by his own repeated sins against the imploring and beseeching and expostulating Spirit, that this Spirit tempted and exercised to the uttermost, has taken its final flight, and put on its inflexible purpose of never returning to this vessel of wrath fitted for destruction.

Now the appeal we have made to the hoary and the habitual and the hackneyed offender, is applicable to you all. If there have come near the hearts of any one of you this day, a single impulse towards the repentance that is unto salvation, it is the Spirit of God who brought the impulse home to your conviction; and you inflict upon Him a wound and a provocation, if you let it be smothered among the levities or the profanenesses or the cold and blasting secularities of this alienated world. You have made this one other attempt in the work of striving with you fruitless; and you are tempting Him to desist from striving altogether. O what a fearful importance it gives to every suggestion of right or of wrong by which you are visited! Encourage the suggestion and follow it; and you encourage the Spirit of God to persevere with you, in the exercise of all His offices. Stifle the suggestion, and resist it, and suffer it to be quenched and forgotten amid the tumults of a noisy headlong and worldly career; and you set up a contest from which God declares, that His Spirit will at length retire. His patience has a limit beyond which it will not pass. And by this one

and that other act of resistance, to the call of Turn and repent and live—by this wretched postponement one day after another in which you have persisted so long—by this deceitful carrying forward of the purpose, to some distant period of your anticipated history—by this delusive miscalculation upon the eleventh hour—you are every day bringing nearer to you that awful consummation, when it might be said of you, what our Saviour said with tears over the devoted city of Jerusalem, "Hadst thou known in thy day the things which belong to thy peace, but now they are for ever hid from thine eyes."

May the Spirit of God press home this interesting argument resistlessly upon you; and by the working of that power of His, by which He is mighty to the pulling down of strongholds, may all your feelings and all your purposes be overborne. May the call of immediate repentance force its way through the withstanding barriers of every heart, that is now trenched in the depths of alienation. In the striving of this day, may He make a conquest over you. And working in you faith with power —and making through this faith your souls a fit habitation for Himself—and stirring up within you the immediate resolution of giving up all that you know to be sinful in your conduct—and plying you with suggestions, which, listened to and obeyed, may open an inviting access into your heart for all His communications—May He thus obtain within you a firm and inviolable lodgment—That brought under the dominion of His purifying and sanctifying and perfecting influences, it may be seen of you,

that you are indeed born again by the word of God, brought home to your consciences with power by the Spirit of God; and have embarked all your energies and all your desires upon that new track of obedience, which carries forward to the glories of immortality, every new creature in Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XI.

ON THE NATURE OF THE SIN UNTO DEATH.

"There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it."—1 JOHN v. 16.

IF we assume that the sin unto death is the same with the sin against the Holy Ghost—then, from what has been said in a previous discourse, it will follow that we regard those people to be on a wrong tract of inquiry, who, with a view to ascertain whether they have committed this sin, look back to their by-gone history; and rummage the depositories of their past remembrance; and try to find, among all the deeds they have ever committed, that one deed of particular enormity, to which the forgiveness of the gospel will not and cannot be extended. There is, in truth, no such deed within the reach of human performance. The blood of Christ can wash away the guilt of all the sins of all the individuals in the assemblage before us; and, in the hearing of every one of you, do we make this free and open announcement of the gospel remedy, in all the power and preciousness which belong to it. It is a matter of rare occurrence, but it does occur, that the imagination of this sin fills the heart of some melancholy patients with the agitations of despair; and spreads a dark and mournful complexion over the secret history of him who is the

victim of it; and keeps the comfort of the gospel far away from him; and fixes in his mind the obstinate delusion, that there is a something about him, which renders him an exception to those wide and universal calls, which are made to circulate at large among all the other sons and daughters of the species. Now this is a misapprehension. The offer is still unto all, and upon all who believe; and he is not excluded from the offer. And there is not a single iniquity of his past life that so excludes him. And if he will only come to Christ in His appointed way; and do honour to the power of His sacrifice, by resting on it; and show respect to His authority, by putting forth all the energy that is in him to act up to its requirements; and evidence his humble submission to the doctrine of the Spirit, by praying for Him in faith; and give proof of the general honesty which runs through all his principles on the subject of the Christian religion, by his diligent use of every revealed expedient, in the way of reading and acting and devoutly observing the appointed ordinances—then do we say to him what we say to you all—that you have taken such a step, and entered upon such a career, and committed yourself to such an infallible guidance, as in spite of all the manifold deformities of your past life, and under all that guilt of rebelliousness which now lies upon you, will translate you into acceptance with the God whom you have so deeply offended; and carry you forward by the ascending march of a progressive and ever-advancing sanctification, to all the glories and all the perfections of a blissful eternity.

But though this retrospective examination of the past is not the way of ascertaining whether you have committed the unpardonable sin, there is a way, not perhaps of ascertaining, but of gathering much both of probability and of most valuable and important information respecting it. The question we put to you is, not what you have done through the life that is past, but what do you feel at present? How is the call we have now sounded in your ears, telling upon your purposes? How is this wondrously free invitation of the gospel entertained by you at this moment? Tell us, if the proclamation of an open path of return to the God from whom you were alienated, is at all disposing you to bestir yourselves and moving you towards Him? Let us know, if it be your intention now, to abandon every one of the things which you know to be the will of Christ that you should abandon; or, in other words, to turn ye from all your iniquities. Let us know, if you wish to submit your hearts to the power and the vitality of His spiritual law. Let us know if you wish for acceptance on the simple footing of His righteousness; and if you wish for holiness through the operation of that Spirit, which is alone able to revolutionize your inner man, and bring it into an entire and an altogether devoted conformity to the will of a heart-searching God Tell us whether the earnest aspiration and the honest intention towards all this be in you; or tell if the urgency of these invitations be now falling without power and without fruit upon your unstimulated consciences. Then know, that, if, in the struggle of your opposing purposes and your

conflicting inclinations, the world shall prevail—we will not say, if you have yet so grieved the Holy Spirit of God, as to determine Him to leave you for ever: But you have at least heightened the provocation, and brought it nearer to the point of His final abandonment. We cannot say of any of you, that you have come this length already. But we can say of all who retire from us this day, without an effective purpose of immediate repentance—that, by this single act of resistance, you have brought yourselves nearer to it. The sin against the Holy Ghost is not a point of mysterious speculation. It is a point of practical importance. It is a point of plain and impressive application to every ordinary conscience. And what a fearful importance does it confer on every call to turn unto God—what a mighty reinforcement to every argument that can be addressed to you for turning immediately—that by every resistance to every single impulse that is made upon you, you are working up the sin against the Holy Ghost nearer and nearer to that point of aggravation, at which He takes His final departure away from you; that you are making farther approaches to a state of desperate impenitency; that you are getting forward to such a pitch of hardened opposition, as constitutes the sin unto death—a sin for which no intercession will avail; no prayer of weeping relative will be lifted with efficacy to heaven; no earthly expedient will ever woo that Spirit back again, whom your manifold provocations and your oft repeated contempt have determined to let you for ever alone.

The sin against the Holy Ghost is not some obscure and useless doctrine, which occupies its hidden corner in the field of revelation; and forms a legitimate topic of speculation only to those, who have attained some rare and monstrous distinction by a daring feat of impiety. It carries a lesson along with it which applies to you all at this very moment. If there be some old among you, upon the obduracy of whose hackneyed consciences, the call we have now lifted in your hearing makes no practical impression—then, look not for the sin against the Holy Ghost in any guilty act by which some passage of your former history is deformed. It consists in that repeated act, by which you have turned the every call of the gospel away from you; and the evidence of it does not lie in any thing that memory can furnish you with out of the materials of the history that is past. The evidence of it lies in the present condition of your soul, as to its moral and religious sensibility; and if that sensibility is so far deranged, as to beget in you at this moment no impulse towards your turning unto God, in that way of appointed mediatorship that is made known to us in the New Testament—this is a fell and an alarming symptom as to you, and well have you reason to suspect and to anticipate and to tremble. Again if there be some old among you, who, after a sleep so long and so profound that it bore a resemblance to the irrecoverable sleep of death, are now visited with a movement and a desire and a concern after these things; and feel a readiness in you to be all that Christ would have you to be; and are looking earnestly towards the way of His

salvation; and long to be established upon it—then we have no power of divination into the way or the mind of the unsearchable Spirit. All that we can do is to put a fair interpretation upon the facts that are before us. And the fact of an arrested conscience even on the eleventh hour of an indolent and a rebellious day, speaks for itself, and tells you that He has not yet left you. And we feel not that we are exceeding our warrant by a single inch, when we try to cheer you on by the language of encouragement; and call upon you not to quench the Spirit—not to let this movement in your heart pass unproductive away from you—not to make of it but one transitory glimpse, previous to an everlasting departure. But do follow out the impulse that you have gotten; and drink in all the comfort that the free grace of the gospel is fitted to inspire; and aspire after all the strictness of walk and conversation, which becomes the profession of it; and let not the imploring cry for the clean heart and the right spirit cease to ascend to the throne of God through the channel of His Son, till the answer come down upon you in all its fulness, and your repentance be perfected.

But let the youngest also among you, (and by addressing ourselves both to old and young we comprehend all who now hear us), learn what a fearful thing it is to tamper with conscience—to stifle any of its movements—to suppress the dictates of your inward monitor on any temptation whatever—or to suffer the small still voice within you to be deafened and overborne by the maddening outcry of those lawless, those deriding, those profligate scorners

with whom you may have unhappily associated. By so doing you commit an offence against the light of conscience. You commit an offence against that present agent, who makes the light to shine upon it. And one such offence facilitates the way to another. And you enter on a career of defiance to principle. And the matter aggravates. And the sin accumulates upon you till it arrives at that fatal point in the history of every man who walks the whole of the broad way which leadeth to destruction—even to that point where the Holy Ghost abandons him for ever; and that just because the sin against the Holy Ghost, is now wrought up to that degree of enormity, which provokes Him to take His final and irrecoverable leave of you. Every slighted call brings you nearer to this point. Every neglected warning brings you nearer to it. Every sermon however much it may be talked of, and liked, and acquiesced in by the understanding, if it tell not on the practical powers, brings you nearer to it. The history of this very day may bring you nearer it. And therefore it is, that we never can consent to repentance on any other terms than repentance now. We never can listen without alarm to all the misapplied phraseology about the eleventh hour. We never can speak to you in any other language, than "to-day while it is called to-day." We never can lay before you the gift of an offered Saviour, but we must speak of "now as your accepted time, and now as the day of your salvation." And we have but one object, and all our explanation has been thrown away on him who retires from us this evening; and who, if

hitherto a stranger to the power and significancy of these things, does not, from this time forward, begin and carry on that good work of turning unto the Lord, which shall terminate in the secure and everlasting enjoyment of His presence in paradise.

Now, to turn all this to the practical account of regulating our intercessions in behalf of others—suppose, in the first instance, that I possessed in a perfect degree, a gift that we know to have been miraculously conferred in the first age of Christianity—the discerning of spirits. Suppose me endowed with the faculty of looking to another man; and taking as accurate a note of the movements of his heart, as if I could perceive through a window the secrecy of all its operations. Give me the power, in particular, of estimating all the degrees of his actual resistance to the voice of conscience; and furnish me at the same time with the knowledge at what point of resistance it is, that the Holy Spirit gives up the man with whom he has been striving to the infatuation of his own perverse and determined wilfulness—and then would I know at what instant of time it was that he had committed the sin unto death. Then I would know how long he remained the hopeful subject of my intercessions; and then would I know the time of his arrival at that point in the history of impenitence, when the inspired Apostle of our text withdraws his positive sanction from my prayers. It is to be observed, that he does not speak upon this subject with the tone and in the terms of decision. He does not peremptorily forbid prayer. He speaks in the manner of a

man who had received no positive commission upon the subject. He leaves it on the footing of a point of doubtfulness, whether a man should pray or not for an acquaintance in these circumstances. He announces himself to his readers, very much in the same way in which Paul announced himself, when he ventured to speak in his own person, and not with the authority of an inspired messenger. "I speak as a man." I give you my own judgment, says Paul, in a matter, in which God has not thought fit to favour me with any revelation. In the verse before us, John does not even venture to give us his own judgment. He goes no further than to express his opinion of the inefficacy, and therefore his doubtfulness as to the propriety of intercession, when it was made in behalf of one who had sinned the sin unto death. But he at least supposes that some of those whom he addressed, had the means of knowing when a professing Christian committed this sin. Suppose them then to have this knowledge. Suppose, that, in virtue of the miraculous gift of discerning spirits, they were made sure of the irrecoverable state of some member of their society. Then they could not pray for his recovery in faith. They could not, along with such a prayer, present that offering to God which is essential to its acceptance. They could not, in this instance, comply with the injunction of the Saviour, who tells His disciples, that whatever they ask in prayer, let them believe that they are to receive it, and they shall receive it. They could not believe that they were to obtain by the power of their supplications, the recovery

of the soul of him, whom they knew that the Holy Spirit had irrecoverably abandoned. They could not therefore do, what, in the verses immediately preceding the text, they were told would give an unfailing success to all their petitions—they could not ask for this thing, knowing at the same time that it was agreeable to the will of God; and therefore knowing that they should have the petitions that they desired of Him. And in these circumstances does John, by expressing his doubtfulness whether such a prayer was right, withdraw at least the sanction of a positive authority, from any intercessions delivered for an object so hopeless and so unattainable.

This then is the practical result that would come out of the circumstances of the first Christians. Those of whom they did not know, that they had committed the sin unto death, they would make the subjects of their intercession before God; and as to those of whom they did know that they had been guilty of this sin, they would feel, from the want of faith in the possibility of the object, and from the discouragement they received at the mouth of an apostle, that they could not pray for them with any efficacy. Now just conceive them to have no certain way of knowing at all, whether any had committed this sin or not—what effect should this have on the practice of intercession? Why, it would bring the whole human race within the circle of their prayers. It would enable them to fulfil the injunction of "pray for all men," without laying any such modification on this precept as is pointed out by the apostle in the text. Those

whom they thought hopefully and well of, they could of course pray for with a higher degree of confidence before God, than those of whom they were ignorant or doubtful. But still there was no positive knowledge of their case being irrecoverable, that ought at all to restrain them from such petitions, as, "Lord, if it be thy will, do thou work faith with power in the heart of this particular acquaintance"—"Lord, if it be possible that the obstinate enmity to the truth which festers in the heart of another, can be made to yield to the influences of thy Divine Spirit, do thou cause it to pass away from him"—"Lord do thou recal my unhappy relative from those depths of alienation in which he is sunk, and raise him from his death in trespasses and sins to the new obedience of a spiritual resurrection." Yes, and though his depravities should accumulate upon him by every hour of his earthly existence; though the hardness of an impenitent heart should be ever gathering into a temper of still more settled obstinacy than before; though habit should be compassing him round, within the enclosure of a tighter and more inextricable bondage; nay, though in the secret counsels of heaven his die should be cast, and months or seasons may have rolled, since the Spirit made His last attempt upon him and then died away into a final and irremediable separation —yet so long as this counsel is a secret to you—so long as in your mind this question has a slight uncertainty to rest upon it—then you are not released from the duty that lies upon you; and acting, as it is your humble and becoming part to

do, on the revealed things which belong to you and to your children—you are at your post when you pray for the man of whose fate you are in the dark, though his fate may have long been fixed and determined on.

Now this exhibits to us the kind of intercourse which goes on very extensively between earth and heaven—the intercourse, if we may use the expression, of praying at a venture. It is a kind of intercourse warranted by scriptural example. Did not our Saviour pray, that, if possible, the cup might pass from Him?—and He had to drink it to the very dregs. Did not Peter tell Simon Magus to pray God, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him? And in the Old Testament, have we not examples of this uncertainty, as to the result both of praying and of doing? Does not God call on the people to prove Him—to put Him to the trial by their prayers? And does not the expression repeatedly occur, "Let us return unto the Lord"—at one time in the way of supplication, at another in the way of obedience?—And it is stated as the effect of it, that it may be the Lord will be gracious.

What then should be the practice of the present day? We have no doubt that there are many who have put the final seal upon their own condemnation. But the question is, are there any upon whom that seal is legible to us? Is there a single individual of our acquaintance, upon whose forehead we can read the inscription, that he is undone? Is there a mark set upon him, by which we can learn, that he has rendered himself a fugi-

tive and a vagabond from the mercy of God? Is there any such index, that at all offers itself to the eye of our senses; and if there be none, then, is there any one of us, who can so weigh the secrets of the heart, and so penetrate into the counsels of God, as to determine of one single human being who walks abroad on the scene of life and population around us, that he is an outcast from prayer? In those days of miracle, when the discerning of spirits was given to apostles and to primitive teachers, there may have been individuals, in behalf of whom the duty of prayer ought to be suspended —who had not only thrown themselves irrecoverably out from the mercies of God, but who, certainly known to be so, had arrested that voice of supplication, which wont to ascend for them from their fellow-men. In those days of wide and visible distinction between the church and the world, when the very profession of Christianity proved a certain degree of sincerity and earnestness—when by the very act of being admitted into the society of disciples, it was made evident, that there was a certain liking for their doctrine; and a certain sympathy in their feelings, and in their faith; and a certain participation in the hopes of the gospel; and a certain tasting of the word of life; and a certain habit of living by the powers of a coming world—In those days, when men by their very profession proved that they were so far partakers of the Holy Ghost—that to throw him off, after all their experience of the power and preciousness of His teaching—that to throw Him off, after all the fellowship they had with Him, and all the favours

of light and direction and joy they had gotten from His hand—argued a degree of resistance more hardened and more irrecoverable, than even to hold out against His first and His earliest instigations—In such days, and with such a visible landmark before them, as the withdrawment of an apostate from their communion, we know not but that even ordinary and unendowed Christians may have been able to judge of some of them, that they had so fallen away, and so crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, and so put Him to an open shame—that they had committed the sin unto death, and were beyond the reach of human prayer, because it was impossible to renew them again unto repentance.* But tell us, if you have attained this certainty of any one man you can point your finger to? Can you say of any one desperado in wickedness, that there goes an outcast from mercy, and that it is vain to pray for him? Or, rather, is it not true of us all, that such is our ignorance of the human heart; and so deep is that veil with which the God of wisdom has chosen to shroud the doctrine of individual destiny—that there is not a man within the range of the acquaintance of any of us, of whom it is not our becoming duty to pray in his behalf, lest peradventure God may give him repentance to the acknowledging of the truth?

Now mark how the very principle which runs through the subject of praying for others at a venture, applies in the whole extent of it to the subject of preaching to others at a venture. He who

* See Heb. vi. 4–6.

is put in charge of the gospel, knows not to whom it shall be the savour of life unto life, and to whom it shall be the savour of death unto death. He is at his post, and in the exercise of his duty, when he proclaims it in the hearing of all, as that free and unconditional offer of mercy which is at the taking of all. He knows not where the offer is to light; nor from whose individual bosom it is to chase away his heavy alienation from the God whom he has offended; nor what is the heart that shall be softened by it out of all the obstinacy of its former impenitence; nor in what quarter of the crowd that is before him, that man is to be found, whose conscience shall surrender itself to the power and urgency of the preacher's voice; nor into whose conviction the winged messenger shall find its entrance, because the power and demonstration of the Spirit have lent to it all its efficacy. Why, he is like a man drawing a bow at a venture; and he knows not whither the arrow is to speed its uncertain way. But of one thing he is certain—that if the argument, by which he is trying now to storm the fortress of human corruption, shall fall fruitless on the soul of any individual amongst you, that soul is strengthening the bulwarks of its future resistance against him; and the weapons of his spiritual warfare are becoming every day more languid and more ineffectual for their purpose; and the Holy Ghost, grieved by this fresh act of contempt and disobedience, is nearer than ever to the step of a final abandonment. And thus it is that a doctrine, which, if it only ministered exercise to the understanding, we never should have touched

upon—a doctrine, which, if it only serve to regale the curiosity of the speculative, is to him of no more use than any one of the lofty abstractions of philosophy—a doctrine which may be talked about, and controverted, and commented on in a thousand different ways, while no salutary alarm is felt, and no energetic purpose is formed, upon the undoubted truth, that every day of procrastination is nearing you to that point of time at which the Spirit shall cease to strive with you—Thus it is that the doctrine of the sin against the Holy Ghost may be turned to the attainment of a practical end. It should so tell, in fact, on the hearts and the consciences of all men as to help on the business of their immediate repentance: and it leaves every one without the shelter of a single pretext, for delaying to turn to God in His appointed way, and, fleeing from all sin, to flee for refuge to the hope set before him in the gospel.

These explanations may serve perhaps to do away a difficulty, which, to the eye of a superficial observer, hangs over a remarkable passage in the history of our Saviour. On His approach to the city of Jerusalem, it is said of Him, that when He came near and beheld the city, He wept over it—saying, "If thou hadst known even thou at least in this thy day the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes." It looks a mystery, that our Saviour should weep for that, which He had power to ward off from the object of his tenderness—that He who created these worlds, and who is now exalted a Prince and a Saviour, should abandon Himself to the helpless-

ness of despair, when He contemplated the approaching fate of that city, which, after all the wrongs He had sustained from it, and all the perverseness and provocations He had gotten from its hands, He still longed after and sighed over in all the bitterness of grief, at the prospect of its coming visitation. Why, it may be thought, could not He have fulfilled the every desire of His sympathizing heart, by interposing the might and sovereignty which belonged to Him? Could not He have arrested the progress of the victorious armies? Could not He have been for a wall of defence around His beloved city; and whence that dark and mysterious necessity, to which even the power of Him, to whom all power was committed both in heaven and earth, was constrained to give way —insomuch that the Being, in whom was vested an omnipotence over the whole domain of Nature and of Providence, felt that He had nothing for it, but to sit Him down and weep over the doom that He saw to be irrevocable? It is true that the inhabitants of this devoted city were the children of darkness. It is true that they still put the calls and the offers of the New Testament away from them. It is true that their yet unpenetrated hearts were shielded round by an obstinacy which had withstood every previous application. But could not He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine in their hearts with such a power and a splendour of conviction, as would have been utterly irresistible? Could not He who is able to subdue all things unto Himself, have subdued His countrymen out of that obstinacy, which had

hitherto stood immoveable to all the influence that was brought to bear upon it? Could not that influence have been augmented? Could it not have been wrought up to such a degree of efficacy, as would have overmatched the whole force and tenacity of their opposing prejudices—and had this been done, the people would have been converted; and the threatened vengeance been withdrawn; and the Saviour would have seen in His countrymen of the travail of His soul, and been satisfied; and the mysterious phenomenon of the greatest and the powerfulest of all beings weeping over a calamity, to avert which He had both the power and the inclination, would not have been presented: and how then does all this accord with what we know, or what we can guess, of the character of God's administration?

Now this brings us to the limit between those secret things which belong to God, and those things which are revealed and which belong to us and to our children. It were well for us that we gave up all our guesses, and made no attempt to be wise above that which is written. And it were well for us that we remained satisfied with what God is pleased that we should know, or with being wise up to that which is written. If the question related merely to the power of God, we are apt to think that there is no limit whatever to what He simply can do. We are apt to think, for example, that God could, if He had so chosen, have lifted, by a simple act of remission, all the penal consequences of sin away from us; and have treated us as creatures, who stood absolved from the guilt

of all our transgressions; and have introduced us in this state into heaven; and made each of us live in a state of enjoyment there throughout all eternity. But God has other attributes than those of mere power. And in virtue of them, He has chosen to conduct the administration of His government on certain great and unchangeable principles. And He has told us, and nothing remains for us but to take the information just as it is given, He has told us, that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, and no forgiveness without faith in that propitiation which is through the death of Jesus. And thus had the Son of God to bear the burden of all the vengeance that we should have borne; and to take upon His shoulders the whole weight of the world's atonement; and to pour out His soul for us in tears and agonies and cries. And had there been no other attributes in the character of the Godhead, but the simple energy of His omnipotence, and the longings of His compassion, all these pains and sorrows of suffering innocence might have been spared; and, without so heavy a sacrifice, the barrier which defended the gate of Paradise might have been opened to a guilty world. But the truth and justice of God demanded an expiation; and we show the docility which belongs to us, when we give our unreserved acquiescence to the recorded fact; and like little children in humility, as we are in understanding, it is our part to take the statement as the statement is offered to us. In the same manner, when His Jewish enemies were proceeding to put our Saviour to the

trial; and were mustering up their witnesses against Him; and were concerting all those measures which led to His execution—He could have interposed, and defeated all their policy, and overthrown all the might of that fearful combination that was leagued to destroy Him: And had there been nothing but power in the case, and a simple desire to ward off from the Son of God all the disgrace and humiliation and misery He was about to endure—how readily would twelve legions of angels have palsied the every arm, and sent consternation into the every heart of His persecutors! But here lay the necessity, and a necessity too, which, according to our Saviour's own account of the matter, constituted an invincible barrier in the way of His deliverance—This cannot be, says He, "for how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled?" The truth of God behoved to be accomplished. The prophecies of God must obtain their vindication. And dire as the spectacle was, to see perfect innocence so cruelly borne down, it was all forced to give way before a great and unchangeable principle in the Divine administration. Now apply this to the matter before us. Take into account only the power of the Saviour to deliver the city of Jerusalem, and the strength of His kind and affectionate desires towards it; and you might think that there lay before Him a plain and practicable way for the fulfilment of the object. But there was another principle of the Divine administration which overruled the whole of this matter; and, without attempting to dive into the reasons of the counsel of God, or to inquire why He has adopted such a

principle—enough for us the bare announcement of the fact that it is so. He has found out, and He has published a way of salvation; and a message of peace is made to circulate round the world; and all who will are made welcome to partake of it; and the Spirit, urging every one to whom the word of salvation is sent to turn unto Christ from their iniquities, plies them with as much argument, and holds out to them as much light, and affects the conscience of one and all of us with as much power—as ought to constrain us to the measure of accepting the Saviour, and relinquishing for Him the idol of every besetting sin and of every seducing vanity. But if we will not be constrained, it is the mode of His procedure with every human soul, gradually to cease from His work of contesting with them. And He will not always strive. And to him who hath the property of yielding to His first influences, more will be given. And to him who hath not, there will even be taken away, from him such influences as he may have already had. And thus it is that the way of the Spirit with the conscience of man, harmonizes with all that we feel and all that we experience of the workings of this conscience. If often stifled and repressed, it will at length cease to meddle with us. And enough for every practical purpose that we know this to be the fact. Enough that it is made known to us as a principle of God's administration, though we know not the reason why it should be so. Enough to alarm us into an immediate compliance with the voice of our inward monitor, that, should we resist it any longer, the

time may come, when even Omnipotence itself will not interpose to save us. Enough to compel our instantaneous respect for all its suggestions, that, should we keep unmoved and unawed by them, even the God of love, who wills the happiness of all His children, may find that the wisdom and the purity and the justice of His government require of Him our final and everlasting abandonment. And O how we should tremble to presume on the goodness of God—when we see the impressive attitude of Him, who, though the kindest and gentlest and best of beings, looked to the great mass of His countrymen, and foresaw the wretchedness that was in reserve for them; and, instead of offering to put forth the might of His resistless energy for their deliverance, did nothing but give way to the tenderness of His nature, and weep for a distress which he would not remedy.

They had got beyond that irrecoverable point we have so much insisted on. They had tried the Spirit of God to the uttermost, and He had ceased to strive with them. At that time of their day, when, had they minded the things which belong to their peace, they would have done it with effect—they put away from them His every admonition, and His every argument; and now there lay upon them the stern and unrelenting doom, that they were for ever hid from their eyes. Let us once more make the application. The goodness of God lies in the freeness of that offer wherewith He urges you now. And He backs this offer by the call of repentance now. And He tells you, that, to carry forward and to perfect

this repentance, He is willing to minister help to all your infirmities now. And on this your day, He calls you to mind these things and to proceed upon these things now. But should this goodness not lead you to repentance—then it is not a goodness that you have any warrant to calculate upon, at any future stage of your history. And the time may come when all these things shall be hid from your eyes. The goodness of God is perfect, as all His other attributes are; but then it is a goodness exercised in that one way of perfect wisdom which He has thought fit to reveal to us. It is a goodness which harmonizes, in all its displays, with such maxims and such principles in the way of God's administration, as God has thought fit to make known to us. It is a goodness that will not survive all the resistance and all the provocation that we may choose to inflict upon it. It is a goodness, in virtue of which, every one of us now may turn to the God whom we have offended; and be assured of His abundant forgiveness; and be admitted into all the privileges of His reconciled children; and, rejoicing in the blood that cleanseth from all sin, stand with all the securities of conscious acceptance before Him; and be established in that way of new obedience, for which He is both able and willing most abundantly to strengthen us. All this now, all this to day while it is called to day, should you harden not your hearts. All this on that critical and interesting now, which is called the accepted time and the day of salvation. But O forget not, that the same Saviour, who sounded just such calls in the ears of his countrymen, and

would have gathered them together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, ere a few years more had rolled over the city of Jerusalem, wept when he beheld it, and thought of the stern and unalterable necessity of its approaching desolation.

SERMON XII.

ON THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

"And he said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."—MARK ii. 27.

THE first recommendation of the Sabbath is the place which it occupies in the decalogue. There was much of Jewish observancy swept away with the ruin of the national institutions. There was much of it designed for a temporary purpose, and which fell into disuse among the worshippers of God after that purpose was accomplished. A Christian of the present day, looks upon many of the most solemn services of Judaism in no other light than as fragments of a perishable ritual—nor does he ever think, that upon himself they have any weight of personal obligation. But this does not hold true of all the duties and all the services of Judaism. There is a broad line of distinction between that part of it which is now broken up, and that part of it which still retains all the authority of a perpetual and immutable law. Point us out a single religious observance of the Hebrews that is now done away, and we are able to say of it, and of all the others which have experienced a similar termination, that they, every one of them, lie without the compass of the ten commandments. They have no place whatever in that great record

of duty which was graven on tables of stone, and placed within the holy of holies, under the mercy-seat. Now, how does the law of the Sabbath stand as to this particular? Does it lie within or without a limit so tangible, and forming so distinct and so noticeable a line of demarcation? We see it then standing within this record, of which all the other duties are of such general and such imperishable obligation. We meet with it in the interior of that hallowed ground, of which every other part is so sacred and so inviolable. We perceive it occupying its own conspicuous place in that register of duties, all of which have the substance and the irrevocable permanency of moral principle. On reading over the other articles of this memorable code, we see all of them stamped with such enduring characters of obligation, as no time can wear away—and the law of the Sabbath taking its station in the midst of them, and enshrined on each side of it among the immutabilities of truth, and justice, and piety. It is true, that much of Judaism has now fallen into desuetude, and that many of its dearest and most distinguished solemnities are now regarded in no other light than as the obsolete and repealed observances of an antiquated ritual. But it is worthy of being well observed, that the whole of this work of demolition took place around and without the line of demarcation. We see no attempt whatever to violate the sanctity of the ground which this line encloses. We no where see any express or recorded incursion upon any one of the observances of the decalogue. We perceive an Apostle in the New Testament making

his allusion to the fifth of these observances, and calling it the first commandment with promise—and by the very notice he bestows on the arrangement of the duties, are we given to understand, that no attempt had been made to disturb their order, or to depose any one of them from the place which had been assigned to it. We should count it an experiment of the most fearful audacity, without the intimation of any act of repeal passed in the high legislature of heaven, to fly in the face of that Sabbath law, which stands enrolled among the items of so notable and so illustrious a document,—and nothing short of a formal and absolute recallment can ever tempt us to think, that the new dispensation of the Gospel has created so much as one vacancy in that register of duties, which bears upon the aspect of its whole history the impress of a revealed standard that is unalienable and everlasting. We cannot give up one article in that series of enactments which, in every one age of the Christian world, has been revealed as a code, not of ceremonial but of moral law. We cannot consent, but on the ground of some resistless and overbearing argument, to the mutilation of the integrity of this venerable record. We see throughout the whole line of the Jewish history, that it stood separate and alone; and that free from all the marks of national or local peculiarity, it bore upon it none of the frailty of the other institutions, but has been preserved and handed down to us an unchanged standard of duty, for all generations. We see, at the very commencement of the Mosaic dispensation, how God Himself

thought fit to signalise it—for, from the place where He stood, did He proclaim the ten commandments of the law, in the hearing of the assembled multitude—while every other enactment, whether moral or ceremonial, was conveyed to the knowledge of the people, through the medium of a human legislature. And we should feel that, in dethroning any one of the preceptive impositions of the decalogue from its authority over our practice, we were bidding defiance to the declared will of the Eternal; and resisting a voice which sounds as loudly and as impressively to our conscience, as the one that issued in thunder from the flaming top of Sinai, and scattered dismay among the thousands of Israel.

But, secondly, in the practice of the Christian world, the Sabbath has been moved forward by one day; and the remembrance to which it is now consecrated, is a different one from that of the creation of the world. For this change we can find no positive enactment; but we can quote the uncontrolled observation of it down from the period of the apostolical age. We are sure that a practice so early and so universal, could not have been introduced without the sanction of Heaven's inspired messengers. And, mark the limit of that liberty which has been taken with the fourth commandment. It amounts to nothing more than the circumstantial change of a day. Had the early Christians felt themselves warranted to take more liberty, they would have taken it—for then was the time when Christianity took its determinate movement away from the practices of the old dispensa-

tion, and established all its distinctions as a religion of principle, and a religion of spiritual character. But widely as the one religion departed from the other, there never, in any one age of the church, has been a departure from the observance of a Sabbath, appropriated to the more solemn and peculiar exercises of piety. The change in the day goes to prove that Christianity is not a religion of mere days. But while it has abandoned one particular day, you find it transferring itself to another; and in the choice of that other, it is guided by the affecting remembrance of an event, the contemplation of which is fitted to strengthen the faith, and to refresh the piety, and to waken the best and most religious feelings of those who are spiritually engaged in it. It commemorates the rise of the crucified Saviour from the grave—of of Him who is the first fruits of them who slept—of Him who by that Spirit which is committed to Him raises all those who are dead in trespasses and sins, to newness of life—of Him who is the great agent of Heaven for repairing all the disorders and all the deformities of the moral world—of Him by whom, as the Word of God, the universe was at first created, but who has since earned a more enduring title to the memory of Christians, by taking upon Him that great scheme, in virtue of which, there are to emerge out of this ruined and rebellious province, a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. At the first creation of the world, the Spirit moved over the turbulence of its confused and jarring elements, and awoke them all to order and to harmony. When

Adam fell, we know not what precise mischief it inflicted on the material world; but we know that the moral world went back again into a wild chaos of dark and disorderly rebellion; and the heart of man lost its obedience to the attractive influences of that great principle which can alone subdue it into harmonious accordancy with the law of God; and the resurrection of Christ from the grave was a mighty and essential step in the counsels of heaven for quelling all the violence of this elementary war,—"for unless I go away, the Comforter cannot come; but if I go to my Father, I shall send him." And from the place which He now occupies, does the Spirit come down at the commission of the exalted Saviour, and He moves on the face of this spiritual chaos, and is ever and anon reclaiming some portion of a moral and renovated empire from the rugged domain of a world lying in wickedness. And the time is yet to come when this ever-renovating Spirit shall fulfil His conclusive triumph, by spreading an entire aspect of worth, and piety, and moral loveliness over the wide extent of a now sinful creation. And thus it is, that while the day of Sabbath has been changed, there is a most affecting remembrance which gives to the observation of Sabbath the full import and significancy of its original purpose—the remembrance of a new creation emerging from an old one —the animating view of life and immortality rising in splendour from the corruption of the grave—the contemplation of an ascended Saviour, who pours the promise of the Father on all His believing disciples—and working in them by the Spirit

the graces of the new creature, prepares them for a welcome entrance into those regions, where sin is unknown, and where death is swallowed up in victory.

But, thirdly, in addition to the slight circumstantial change which has been made upon the Sabbath, and which we are sure no honest and enlightened Christian can ever construe into an entire and absolute repeal of the whole institution —there is a general change affecting every one of the ten commandments, but which was never so well understood till the new dispensation was fully and fairly ushered into the world. We do not mean to say, that the worthies of the Old Testament were utter strangers to that doctrine of grace on which the Spirit of God, working in larger measure on the minds of the Apostles, from the day of Pentecost, has poured so clear and so celestial a splendour. We believe that many Jews were, under the shadow of their types and their sacrifices, trained to the faith, and the humility, and the affectionate obedience of creatures who knew themselves to be incapable of perfect conformity to the law of God—and that, in the act of serving him, they stood on essentially the same footing of mercy to pardon and grace to help in the time of need, on which a spiritual Christian of the day now feels himself to be so firmly and so conclusively established. The change we are alluding to, then, did not take place at the first settlement of the new dispensation. It only came out at that time into more distinct exhibition; and it consists in this; that whereas the direct and natural

way of taking up the promulgated law of God, is to take it up as a law of works, and to labour at the performance of it on the understood condition of "This do, and ye shall live"—and as this condition has not been fulfilled by a single son or daughter of the species, then, unless some new arrangement of the matter between God and man had been entered into, life was forfeited by every one of us, and we should just have been what the New Testament tells us we actually are, anterior to our reception of the Gospel, the children of wrath, and under the full operation of the sentence, that "the soul which sinneth it shall die." Now, it would lead us away from our subject into a most interminable excursion, did we say all that might be pertinently and substantially said on the precise turn which the Gospel has given to the obligation of the law. Eternal life is no longer the wages of perfect obedience. It is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. The man who has faith to perceive the reality of this gift, lays hold of it, and rejoices in all the enlargement of conscious forgiveness, and in all the cordialities of a secure and confident reconciliation, with the God whom he had offended. But this faith does not set him loose from any one of the duties of obedience. Had no other doctrine been proposed to the believer, than the single one of forgiveness through the redemption that is in the blood of Jesus, then we can conceive how the dawning of the Gospel faith might be a signal for the emancipation of the whole man from the restraints of moral obligation. But other doctrines have been proposed; and

faith, which is neither more nor less than a reliance on the divine testimony, gives an equally honest and welcome admission to all the particulars of that testimony. It embraces all the particulars of God's communication; and, such is the amplitude of its grasp, that though as a principle, it is single and undivided, and can be defined within the limits of a short sentence—yet grant us the existence of this principle, and then you grant us room enough, and provision enough for giving effect to every one of the lessons of revelation. When faith attaches itself to the doctrine of reconciliation through Christ, it will make him who possesses it, to walk before God without fear. When faith attaches itself to the doctrine, that "without holiness no man can see God, it makes him who possesses it, to "walk before God without fear, in righteousness and in holiness." When faith attaches itself to the doctrine, that unless ye do such and such commandments, ye shall not inherit the kingdom of God, it makes him who possesses it, feel as constraining an urgency of personal interest in the work of keeping these commandments, as if the old covenant of works had got up again, and he behoved to ply his assiduous task for the rewards of perfect obedience. When faith attaches itself to the doctrine of every man receiving his award at the judgment-seat, according to the deeds done in the body, it makes him who possesses it just strive with as much earnestness to multiply good deeds—as if each performance done at the bidding of the Saviour, was a distinct addition to the treasure reserved for him in heaven. But faith does

attach itself to every one of these doctrines, or it is no faith at all. It gives the homage of its reliance to each particular of the law and the testimony. It clears its unfettered way from among the perplexities of human arrangement; and disowning every authority but that of the one master, it sits at His feet with the docility of a little child, and appropriates to its right influence every item of His communications. And thus it is, that the man who is in simplicity and in good faith a believer, while he rejoices all the day long in the sunshine of a countenance which he knows to be friendly to him, labours all the day long at his faithful and assiduous task of doing every thing to the glory of God. There is room enough in his enlarged heart for knowing, that while the one is his offered privilege, the other is his required duty —and free, as he is, from all the embroilments of a darkening speculation, he does not wait for the adjustment of any human controversy on the subject; but, taking himself to his Bible, he both lives in all the security of the offered reconciliation, and without questioning the simple announcement of the Saviour, that "if ye love me, ye will keep my commandments," he also lives in all the diligence of one who is "steadfast and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord."

It is true, that there is a difference between being under the law, and under grace. But how does this difference affect the morality of a Christian? Let us take the deliverance of an Apostle upon the subject. "Shall we sin," says Paul, "because we are not under the law, but

under grace? God forbid." Quite the contrary, for it is precisely because we are under grace, that sin hath not dominion over us. We must shorten this explanation, and bring it to bear on the observation of the Sabbath. The great interest of practical obedience is upheld under the dispensation of the Gospel, by all the securities of positive and preceptive obligation. But more than this—there is such a change wrought by grace in the heart of every believer, that he not only understands the obligation, but is made cordially to acquiesce in it. There is such a revolution in his desires, that it is now his meat and drink to do the will of that God, against whom there existed within him the most stubborn and revolting enmity. The man, who, by faith, now looks on God as his friend, will have no difficulty in understanding this change, for he feels it; and there is not a believer on the face of the earth who does not, from the time of his becoming so, love that law which he aforetime violated. This law was at first graven on tables of stone, and held out for the government of a helpless and guilty race, who were both unable and unwilling to yield to it the loyalty of their obedience; and it therefore served to them for a ministry of condemnation. When the dispensation of grace was brought in, this law was not abrogated. One of the most illustrious exercises of the grace of God, consisted in His putting forth a device for securing the observance of His laws; and this device is neither more nor less than putting the law in our hearts, and writing it in our minds. On the change taking place from our being under the law, to our

being under grace, the law, to use the language of the Bible, is taken down from the place it formerly occupied on tablets of stone, and from which it frowns upon us in all the wrath of its violated dignity; and it is graven on the fleshly tablets of the heart—or, in other words, the man is endowed with a liking for that which he formerly rebelled against. And grant him possessed of the genuine principle of faith; and there can be no doubt, that the Spirit, true to His office, has been at work within him, and has given a new bent to his affections, and has turned him to the love of those commandments, which he aforetime hated and resisted, and has established in his bosom this omnipotent security for obedience, that the taste and the inclinations of the new creature, are now upon its side; and as if carried forward by the spontaneous and inborn alacrity of a constitutional impulse, does the man who is thus transformed, and thus acted upon by that Spirit, for which he never ceases to pray, run with delight in the way of all the commandments.

Now, we have already attempted to satisfy you, that there is no erazure of the fourth commandment from that lettered record of the law, which is met with in your Bibles; and where the institution of the Sabbath is graven as indelibly as any one of the unchangeable moralities, among which it is situated. But by the new dispensation of the Gospel, this law is made to stand in another place. It is conveyed, as it were, from its old position, on a tablet of stone, and written in the characters of a living epistle on the tablet of a believer's heart.

Now the question we have to put is—in this transference of the law from its old to its new repository, does any one of its articles fall away from it, and is lost, as it were, in the passage, by being loosened and detached from the other articles, among which it was incorporated? We can specify some, at least, of the ten commandments, which have found their way safe and entire to the heart of him who has embraced the Gospel, and lives under the power of its purifying influences. We are sure, that such a man will have his supreme affections fastened upon God; and renouncing every idol whether of wealth, or of ambition, or of vanity, that can dethrone the Father of his spirit from His rightful ascendancy, he will prefer no one object of regard, or of reverence before Him. We are sure, that such a man will be quite in earnest to have a right knowledge and conception of God—that the Being he worships may be the true God—and lest, by directing his homage to some false and distorted picture of his own fancy, he may incur all the guilt, and be carried away by all the delusion of him who falls down to a material image, in lowly and bending adoration. We are sure that such a man will do honour to the hallowed name of his Master, who is in heaven, and be sickened and appalled by that profaneness which is so current in many of our companies. We are sure that such a man will revere his earthly parents, and will stand by them in the midst of their sinking infirmities; and whether in the form of a declining father, or a widowed mother, who has thrown the whole burden of her dependence on the children

who remain to her, we are sure that he will never turn a contemptuous ear to the feebleness of their entreating voice—but will bid his proud and aspiring manhood give up to their authority all its waywardness, and all its tumultuous independence. We are quite sure, that in the heart of such a man, there is an aspiration of kindliness toward every thing that breathes, and that the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" carries in his bosom the widely extended import of thou shalt not conceive one purpose, nor carry against a single human being, one rankling sentiment of malignity. We are sure, that such a man, far removed from all that is licentious in practice, will recoil, even in the unseen solitude of thought, from all that is licentious in conception; and spurning away from the pure sanctuary of his heart every evil and unhallowed visitation, he will present to the approving eye of Heaven, all the adornments of a spiritual temple, all the graces and all the beauties of an unspotted offering. We are sure, that such a man, with a hand unsoiled by any one of the gains of injustice, will, with all the sensitiveness of high-minded and honourable principle, keep himself as nobly aloof from substantial as from literal dishonesty. He will feel superior to every one of those tolerated artifices, and those practical disguises, which, throughout the great mass of mercantile society, have so hardened and so worn down the consciences of those, who for years, have been speeding and bustling their way amongst a variety of manifold transactions—and in the high walk of simplicity and godly sincerity, will he carry along

with him the impress of one of the peculiar people, amid all the legalized fraudulency of a selfish and unprincipled generation. We are quite sure, that such a man, seeing he had put on the deeds of the new creature, would never suffer the burning infamy of a lie to rest upon him. All that was within him, and about him, would be clear as the ethereal firmament. The wiles of a deceitful policy would be utterly unknown to him. The openness and the ingenuousness of truth, would sit upon his forehead; and his every utterance bear upon it as decided a stamp of authority, as if shielded by a solemn appeal to God and to the judgment-seat. And, lastly, we are quite sure, that such a man could not breathe a single avaricious desire after the substance of another. His heart is set on another treasure. He has entered the service of another master than the mammon of unrighteousness. His affections have settled on a more enduring substance. With the eye of faith, he looks to heaven, and to its unfading and unperishable riches; and all the splendours of this world's vain and empty magnificence, sink into worthlessness before them. He can eye the golden career of his more prosperous neighbours, without one wistful sentiment either of covetousness or of envy; and feels not the meanness and the hardships of his humbler condition, amid the tranquillities of a heart that is cherishing a better prospect, and reposing on the sure anticipation of a happier and more enduring home.

Well, then, in the heart of this man, of whom we suppose nothing more than that he has drunk

in the genius of our better dispensation, we find graven in the most legible and distinct characters, nine of the commandments. We meet with all the ten in the letter of the Old Testament, and we find nine out of these ten in a state of most vigorous and entire operation, under the spirit of the New Testament. What has become of the fourth commandment? Has it sunk and disappeared under the stormy vicissitudes of that middle passage, through which all the rest have found their way, from the tablets of a literal inscription, and have gotten their secure and unviolable lodgment within the tablet of a Christian heart? If we look into that heart, do we meet with no trace of the commandment we are in quest of? Will you tell us, that the law of the Sabbath is erazed, we will not say from the remembrance, but from the affection of any one of the actual Christians by whom you are surrounded? Has it left behind it a vacancy in that spiritual tablet which is graven by the Spirit of God, when He writes the law in the believer's heart, and puts it into his mind? This is a question of observation—and speaking from our own observation, we never, in the whole round of it, met with a man, drawn by the cords of love to the doing of the other commandments, and carrying in his heart either a distaste or an indifference for the fourth of them? We may have seen men high in honour, and earning by their integrity, the rewards of an unsullied reputation amongst their fellow-citizens, carrying a visible contempt for the Sabbath law throughout the whole line of their Sabbath-history—but all the truth and

all the justice of these men are such constitutional virtues as may exist in a character which owns not, and feels not the power of godliness—and sure we are, that wanting this power, several of the other commandments can be specified, to which they are as utter strangers as to the commandment of the seventh day. We repeat it, therefore, that if you grant us a man who bears about with him in his bosom, a warm and conscientious attachment to all the articles of the decalogue but this one, before we look at him, we say with confidence, that search him, and both in his heart and in his practice, this one is to be found—and that we shall not fail to meet the Sabbath law as firmly established as any other within the secrecies of his bosom, and standing out as conspicuously on the front of his external observations. We never, in the whole course of our recollections, met with a Christian friend, who bore upon his character every other evidence of the Spirit's operation, who did not remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. We appeal to the memory of all the worthies who are now lying in their graves, that eminent as they were in every other grace and accomplishment of the new creature, the religiousness of their Sabbath-day shone with an equal lustre amid the fine assemblage of virtues which adorned them. In every Christian household, it will be found, that the discipline of a well-ordered Sabbath is never forgotten amongst the other lessons of a Christian education—and we appeal to every individual who now hears us, and who carries the remembrance in his bosom of a father's worth, and a father's piety, if

on the coming round of the seventh day, an air of peculiar sacredness did not spread itself over that mansion, where he drew his first breath, and was taught to repeat his infant hymn, and lisp his infant prayer. Rest assured, that a Christian, having the love of God written in his heart, and denying the Sabbath a place in its affections, is an anomaly that is no where to be found. Every Sabbath image, and every Sabbath circumstance, is dear to him. He loves the quietness of that hallowed morn. He loves the church-bell sound, which summons him to the house of prayer. He loves to join the chorus of devotion, and to sit and listen to that voice of persuasion which is lifted in the hearing of an assembled multitude. He loves the retirement of this day from the din of worldly business, and the inroads of worldly men. He loves the leisure it brings along with it—and sweet to his soul is the exercise of that hallowed hour, when there is no eye to witness him but the eye of heaven—and when in solemn audience with the Father, who seeth him in secret, he can, on the wings of celestial contemplation, leave all the cares, and all the vexations, and all the secularities of an alienated world behind him. O how is it possible, that a man can be under the dominion of a principle of piety, who does not love that day which brings round to piety its most precious opportunities? How is it possible, that he can wear the character of a religious being, if the very day which offers him the freest time for the lessons and the exercises of religion, is spent in other exercises, or idly suffered to roll over his head in no exercise at

all? How is it possible, that there can exist within him any honest care of his eternity, if the best season for carrying on, without disturbance, the preparations of eternity, pass away in disgust and in weariness? How is it possible, with all the tenderness of his instinctive nature for the members of his family, that there can be one particle of tenderness for their souls, if this day run on at large from all the restraints of Christian discipline; and careless parents giving themselves up to neglect and to indolence, make no effort to reclaim the wild ignorance of children, untaught and untrained to that wisdom which is unto salvation? The thing is not to be conceived; and upon the strength of all these impossibles, do we assert, that every real Christian has the love of the Sabbath engraven on the tablet of the inner man—that if you had a window to his bosom, you would there see the fourth commandment filling up as large a space of that epistle, which is written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, as it does in the decalogue of Moses—that this is not the peculiarity of some accidental Christians, meeting our observation on some random walk over the face of Christian society—that it is the constant and universal attribute of all Christians—that in every age of the church the love of the Sabbath, and an honest delight in all its pious and profitable observances, have ever stood out among the visible lineaments of the new creature in Jesus Christ our Lord—that the great Spirit, whose office it is to inscribe the law of God on the hearts of those whose sins are forgiven them and whom He has

admitted into the privileges of His new and His better covenant, has never omitted, in a single instance, to make the remembrance of the Sabbath one of the most conspicuous, and one of the most indelible articles of that inscription. And thus has it happened, that without any statutory enactment in the whole compass of the New Testament upon the subject—without any formal setting forth of Sabbath observation, or any laying down of a Sabbath ceremonial, the grave, the solemn, the regular, and with all this, the affectionate keeping of this distinguished day, has come down to us through a series of eighteen centuries, and may be recognized to this hour as the ever present badge of every Christian individual—and as the great index and palladium of religion in every Christian land.

We shall just say one thing more upon this subject at present. What now becomes of him, who, like a special pleader, with a statute book in his hand, thinks that the New Testament has set him at large from every one style of Sabbath observation, because he cannot find in it any laying down of Sabbath observances? He will not own the force of any obligation till it be shown to him as one of the clauses in the bond. His constant appeal is to the bond. He will not exceed, by a single inch, the literalities of the bond. He will square his every service, and his every offering by the bond—and when he is charged with any one of the misdemeanours of Sabbath-breaking, he will tell you that it is not specified in the bond. Why, if the bond be what he stands upon, he just wakens up against himself the old ministry of condemnation.

If it be on the just and even footing of the bond, that he chooses to have his exactly literal dealings with God, on this footing God will enter into judgment with him—and soon, and very soon, will He convict him of his glaring deficiencies from his own favourite standard the bond. Ah, when a Christian serves his reconciled Father, it is the service of a liberal and spontaneous attachment. His aim is to please Him and to glorify Him to the uttermost; and he is never more delighted than when it is in his power to offer the God whom he loves, some of those substantial testimonies of affection which no jealousy can extort by any of its enactments, and the letter of no law is able to embody in any of its descriptions. With such a spirit, and such a cordiality within, we cannot doubt for a moment the delight which such a man will take in the Sabbath—and how dear to his bosom will the affecting remembrance be to which it is consecrated—and how diligently he will cultivate its every hour to the purpose for which it was made—and how, knowing that the Sabbath was made for man, he will earnestly and honestly give himself to the task of realizing all its usefulness to himself and to his family. And do you think, that God will not see this? Do you think, that He will stand in need of any literal specifications by which He may mark the character of this man on the day of retribution? Will He not be able to read that epistle which He himself has engraved on the fleshly tablets of his heart? Will He not know His own? Will He not recognize all the lineaments of that new creature, which has been

fashioned by His own spirit—and on that day when the secrets of every heart are laid open, will not the Sabbath observations of an honest and affectionate believer, flowing, as they do, from the impulses of a love for that law which is written on his mind, be put down among those good deeds which shall be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the solemn reckoning of the judgment seat?

SERMON XIII.

THE CHRISTIANITY OF THE SABBATH.

'If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord: and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."—ISAIAH lviii. 13, 14.

THERE are some who are disposed to assign to the Sabbath the same rank with the positive and ceremonial observances of Judaism; and who think that the authority of its obligations has ceased, with the rigours and the burdens of that grosser economy which has now gone by; and who make the spirituality of our own more enlightened dispensation the argument on which they would found the relaxation, if not the utter neglect, of this ordinance: and, in all this, they feel themselves to be very much confirmed by the silence of the New Testament, which never recognises the institution but for the purpose of reducing the austerities which had of old been thrown around it. And, therefore, would they assimilate the keeping of this day to the performing of any of those rites that have no place in Christianity; and bear to it no more regard, than they

would to any of those Hebrew festivals which, since the destruction of the temple, and the coming in of another system of worship, has fallen into total and irrecoverable desuetude.

For the permanency of the Sabbath, however, we might argue its place in the decalogue, where it stands enshrined among the moralities of a rectitude that is immutable and everlasting; and we might argue the traditional homage and observancy in which it has been held since the days of the Apostles; and we might argue the undoubted and experimental fact, that where this day is best kept, there all the other graces of Christianity are in most healthful exercise and preservation. But we rather waive, for the present, all these considerations; and would rest the perpetuity of the Sabbath law on this affirmation, that, while a day of unmeaning drudgery to the formalist, it is, to every real Christian, a day of holy and heavenly delight,—that he loves the law, and so has it graven on the tablet of his heart, with a power of sovereignty upon his actions, which it never had when it was only engraven on a tablet of stone, or on the tablet of an outward revelation,—that, wherever there is a true principle of religion, the consecration of the Sabbath is felt, not as a bondage, but is felt to be the very beatitude of the soul,—and that, therefore, the keeping of it, instead of being to be viewed as a slavish exaction on the time and services of the outer man, is the direct and genuine fruit of a spiritual impulse on the best affections of the inner man.

Christianity does not dispense with service on the part of its disciples. It only animates this

service with another principle, substituting what itself calls the newness of the spirit for the oldness of the letter. Now, the question is, Can such a substitution be made to pass upon the services of the Sabbath?—for, if not, the genius of Christianity would appear to demand, that we should be rid of the Sabbath altogether, which ought not to be retained, unless it can be brought into accordancy with the style and character of the new religion. But if, on the other hand, the Sabbath is really capable of being translated from the oldness of the letter to the newness of the spirit—there may be no need, under the economy of the Gospel, for the Sabbath being discarded—it were quite enough, that it should be accommodated to our more enlightened dispensation. There is a Judaical style of Sabbath observancy, and this ought to give place to the genius of our better economy. But there may, also, be a Christian style of Sabbath observancy; in which case, we have not to abolish this institution, but only to transfuse into its services the same spirit which the Gospel transfuses into all other services. Let the Sabbath be altogether done away, as out of keeping with Christianity, if only signalized from all other days by the bodily exercise which profiteth little; and if it admit not of being so signalized by that godliness which is profitable unto all things. It were a most unseemly appendage to the discipleship of the gospel, could it not be delivered from the aspect of a morose and unbending Pharisee; and be softened and transformed into the aspect of a free, and joyful, and affectionate worshipper of the God of love. We are willing to

rest, upon this condition, the claims of Sabbath to the homage and observation of Christians; and, should it not be possible to make the condition good, we are willing that the Sabbath should pass away with the feasts and the holidays of a ritual that is now superannuated.

Certain it is, that the Sabbath day may be made to wear an aspect of great gloom and great ungainliness, with each hour having its own irksome punctuality attached to it; and when the weary formalist, labouring to acquit himself in full tale and measure of all his manifold observations, is, either sorely fatigued in the work of filling up the unvaried routine, or is sorely oppressed in conscience, should there be the slightest encroachment either on its regularity, or on its entireness. We may follow him through his Sabbath history, and mark how, in the spirit of bondage, this drivelling slave plies at an unceasing task, to which, all the while, there is a secret dissatisfaction in his own bosom, and with which he lays an intolerable penance on his whole family. He is clothed in the habiliments of seriousness, and holds out the aspect of it; but never was aspect more unpromising or more unlovely. And, in this very character of severity, is it possible for him to move through all the stages of Sabbath observancy—first, to eke out his morning hour of solitary devotion; and then to assemble his household to the psalms, and the readings, and the prayers, which are all set forth in due and regular celebration; and then, with stern parental authority, to muster, in full attendance for church, all the children and domestics who belong to him; and then, in his com-

pressed and crowded pew, to hold out, in complete array, the demureness of spirit that sits upon his own countenance, and the demureness of constraint that sits on the general face of his family; and then to follow up the public services of the day by an evening, the reigning expression of which shall be, that of strict, unbending austerity—when the exercises of patience, and the exercises of memory, and a confinement that must not be broken from, even for the tempting air and beauty of a garden, and the manifold other interdicts that are laid on the vivacity of childhood, may truly turn every Sabbath as it comes round into a periodical season of sufferance and dejection: And thus, instead of being a preparation of love and joy for a heaven of its own likeness, may all these proprieties be discharged, for no other purpose, than that of pacifying the jealousies of a God of vengeance, and working out a burdensome acquittal from the exactions of this hard and unrelenting task-master.

Now, it must be quite evident, that such a Sabbath is characterized throughout by the oldness of the letter. The fear, and the disquietude, and even that sense of the meritoriousness of works, which all issue from the spirit of legality, may easily be witnessed in its various services. And nothing can be more palpable than the want of heart and of good will in its whole style of observation. It is an affair, not of love, but of labour—not the homage of spontaneous affection, but a mere thing of handiwork, and of bodily exercise. The very soreness and scrupulosity of the man's conscience, on the accidental misgiving of any of his arrangements, are

at utter antipodes with the liberty of one of the children of God. There is no one character of a free celestial spirit that exists beneath this grim form and parade of godliness. It is like the attempt to make a purchase of heaven by the pains and the privations of a rigorous devoteeship; and little are many of our sturdy professors aware, how much the operose drudgery of their Sabbath is at variance with their own orthodoxy,—how often it is prosecuted with the view to establish a righteousness of their own,—and how there may mingle with these laborious sanctities, both of public worship and of private and family exercise, the very spirit in which either Papist or Pharisee thinks that he will carry heaven on the strength of his manifold observations.

But after all the sabbath was made for man; and the worthlessness of such a sabbath as the one we have now attempted to pourtray, is no argument against an institution which must be capable of a most important subserviency to the great cause of moral and religious improvement. Though often kept according to the oldness of the letter—that is no reason why it may not also be kept according to the newness of the spirit; and if so, then is it fully entitled to a place of high authority among all the other services of an enlightened Christianity. And accordingly the very services which are rendered by one man in the spirit of a crouching servility as drivelling and pharisaical, may, when rendered by another, be the genuine emanation of a heart that is altogether free and fearless and affectionate towards God. To the

eye of the world, there may be a strong visible resemblance both in the kind and in the succession of these exercises—while to the eye of God, and in respect of essential character, they differ as widely as light does from darkness. It makes the utmost possible dissimilarity between one human soul and another, whether the sabbath be like a fast that affects the soul, or like a feast that yields to it its best loved entertainment. In the one case, it is certainly possible to be most sternly resolved on the drudgery of all its services—even as it is possible for a man of the world, on the mere strength of an obstinate determination, to stand out for hours together the hallowed air of a conventicle of piety however hateful it may be to him. But it argues a man of a distinct moral species altogether, and to be endowed as it were with such organs of moral respiration as the other does not possess, who can breathe in that air with delight, and feels it to be the very element by which he loves most to be surrounded. So that the wretched sabbath history, which we have already offered to your notice, is quite another thing, from a history which bears to it a very strong external resemblance; but is impregnated by wholly another spirit, and is sustained throughout all the stages of it by another principle—The history not of a sabbath drudge, but of a sabbath amateur, who rises with alacrity to the delight of the hallowed services that are before him—who spends too his own hour of morning communion with his God, and from the prayer-opened gate of heaven catches upon his soul a portion of

heaven's gladness—who gathers too his family around the household altar, and there diffuses the love and the sacred joy which have already descended upon his own bosom—who walks along with them to the house of prayer; and, in proportion as he fills them with his own spirit, so does he make the yoke of confinement easy and its burden light unto them—who plies them with their evening exercise, but does it with a father's tenderness, and studies how their task shall become their enjoyment—who could, but for example's sake, walk fearlessly abroad and recognise in the beauties of nature the hand that has graced and adorned it; but that still a truer charm awaits him in the solitude of his own chamber, where he can hold converse with the piety of other days, with some worthy of a former generation who being dead still speaketh, with God himself in the book of His testimony, or with God in prayer whom he blesses for such happy moments of peace and of preciousness. And so he concludes a day, not in which his spirit has been thwarted, but in which his spirit has been regaled—a day of sunshine to the recurrence of which he looks onward with cheerfulness—a day of respite from this world's cares—a day of rejoicing participation in the praises and spiritual beatitudes of the future world.

Now if you have no taste for such a sabbath as this, you have no taste for heaven. If these services be a weariness to your heart, then the services of the blest in eternity were also a weariness to your heart. You are still of the earth and

earthy; and when this world is burnt up, and the whole universe is thrown into two great departments—of a sabbath and sainted territory on the one hand, where the redeemed and the unfallen alike rejoice in the prayers and praises of the Eternal; and a doleful region of blasphemy on the other, where be those accursed outcasts who bear no love to God and have no delight in the exercises of godliness—Then recollect, that, beside the one and the other of these dominions, there is not one spot of ground like this temporary and intermediate earth that you will have to stand upon. And, distasteful as you are of sacredness here, and with no other alternative there than sacredness for ever or suffering for ever, what other doom is left for us to pronounce upon you, who so love the occupations of this week-day world, and so droop and languish under the weary routine of sabbath prayers and sabbath services, than that when the world is dissolved and no place is found within the limits of creation but one abode for the celestial and another for the damned—then will this your dislike to the fourth commandment be indeed the fellest indication of your unmeetness for a seat of glory, of your being a vessel of wrath and fitted for destruction.

You will perceive then a very striking peculiarity in this sabbath law—that, perhaps of all others, it is best fitted to exemplify the distinction between the oldness of the letter and the newness of the spirit; and is at the same time so abundantly capable of being kept in the latter style of observation, as most abundantly entitles it to its old

place in the decalogue even under the pure and enlightened economy of the gospel. In one way of it, it may be nothing better than an elaborate ceremonial, a lifeless body of religiousness without the breath of its warm and animating spirit, and whereby the starch and unbending formalist of our day can still exhibit the very gait and character of grossest Judaism. In the other way of it, it may have all the refinement and rationality of a service that is altogether celestial; and be the efflorescence of a heart that is touched with fire and feeling from the upper sanctuary; and be the truest symptom that can possibly be given of a spiritual taste and a spiritual affection; and, with all its outward resemblance to the sabbath of a formalist, stand as much apart from it in essential character as the devotion of a seraph from the drivelling of a slave; and, so far from savouring of that earthly Jerusalem where Pharisees of old heaped their laborious offerings on the altar of legality, may the Sabbath of a Christian be the very nearest specimen that occurs in our world of that Jerusalem above where all is freedom and confidence and good will. And distaste, we repeat it, for the services of such a sabbath as this, is just distaste for the services of eternity. The very commandment, which, when kept in the spirit of a fearful scrupulosity argues you to be still in beggary and bondage, is the commandment that, when kept in the willingness of a spontaneous heart, argues you to have the exalted taste and liberty of one of God's children: And it is indeed a striking singularity of this observance, that, though when

punctually rendered against the grain, it is but the drudgery of a worthless superstition—yet when pleasantly rendered and because with the grain, it becomes kindred in quality with all that is most pure and ethereal in sacredness; and the best evidence that can be given of the regenerating touch, whereby earth-born man is assimilated to an angel, and becomes a new creature in Christ our Lord.

We have now only to say in conclusion of this part of our argument, that something more ought to be gained by it, than the mere specific object of evincing the Sabbath to be in full harmony with the spirit and character of the Gospel. We should like, if, in the course of these observations, any thing may have been said that is fitted to arrest the conscience of hearers. We think that the Sabbath may be turned into a very palpable and powerful instrument for the discovery of your real spiritual condition. You will know surely whether its peculiar services are felt by you to be a pleasure or an annoyance—whether there be dulness or delight in its psalmody—whether the longing of the soul be towards its retirements, or towards a relief from them—whether the morning be most rejoiced in, because it ushers in a day of sacredness, or the evening because it terminates the irksome round, and brings you again to the margin of that element in which you most love to expatiate. You will be able to tell whether you are most at home in your closets or in your countinghouses? You have spent many Sabbaths in the world; and you may at least say from the recollection of them, whether your taste is for communion with God, and how

far the spirit that is in you congenializes with the feelings and the exercises of piety. We are not aware of a better test, or of one that can be turned to readier use and application; and we therefore urge it upon you, to come to a conclusion upon the question—whether your heart be more set upon the things of the world among which you move and are busily conversant through the six days of the week; or on those things that are above, and to which the duties and opportunities of the seventh day give you the power of a nearer and more affecting approximation—whether you like it best, to be immersed in the business and the pleasure and companionship of a scene that is speedily to pass away; or to stand as it were at the gate and on the confines of that inheritance which is in heaven, and there catch a glimpse of its coming glories, and be refreshed by a sample and a foretaste of its coming blessedness? Tell us which is the drift of your prevailing inclinations? Whether be they towards the secularities of commercial or festive or fashionable life, or be they towards the serenities of faith and prayer and spiritual contemplation? We ask you not to lie overwhelmed in utter hopelessness, if heretofore it is too plain that you have been a child of the present world—without the taste for sacredness, and with scarcely an aspiration after it. But we do ask you to mark by the intelligible appeal that we have now made to you, how wide the transition is from the atmosphere of nature's every-day pursuits and every-day propensities, to the atmosphere of all that grace and goodness in which if you cannot breathe with

comfort here, you will never breathe in heaven hereafter. We bid you reflect what a vast and untrodden distance you have still to walk, ere you reach a meetness for the joys and a taste for the sanctities of the upper paradise. We crave your attention to the vast immeasurable space by which humanity has receded from the ground which it once occupied, and become as an alien and an outcast in a far country from the great family of holiness; and we would put you the question, whether to the truth of Scripture there is not an echo in your own experience—when you read how total the revolution of character must be—how a something tantamount to a new birth and a new creation must take effect upon the soul, ere you shall become an heir of the everlasting kingdom, or have entered on that course of grace which leads to a consummation of full and finished glory?

But how shall this transition be effected? How shall the soul be made to gather upon it a taste and a temper so opposite to that of its first nature? How shall it be made to relish as its best loved enjoyment, that which it has hitherto felt to be irksome and unsavoury? Wonderful change in the habit of the affections you will allow, if he who at one time nauseated the air of the public or private sanctuary, shall now breathe therein with delight, as in the element that is best suited to him—and the Sabbath from a service of weariness shall become a service of willingness. This would imply a change equivalent to that by which the old man is transformed into the new creature—and it will be seen that our present topic though in regard

to the matter of it it be but one solitary and specific observation, yet when viewed in its proper bearing it rises into a question of general and paramount importance—for the question how shall I learn to love the Sabbath is commensurate to the question how shall I be so renewed in the spirit of my mind, as that I who have been heretofore carnal, and whose affections were only kindred with the objects of sense, and of intellect, shall now become spiritual, and have a kindred pleasure in the objects and the contemplations of sacredness?

It may serve to throw some light on the real difficulties of this transition, when we reflect on what that is which we can do, and what that is which we cannot do in reference to Sabbath observation. We can task ourselves with the manifold varieties of bodily exercise. We can forcibly withdraw our presence from the fields, and constrain our presence either to church or to our closets. We can by dint of mere strenuousness endure a Sabbath confinement however irksome, and breathe a sabbatic atmosphere however dull; but to turn the irksome into the agreeable, and what is dull in the Sabbath of the Lord to feel it a delight and honourable—in attempting this, with only the resources and the energies of Nature at command, man feels himself at the limit of his helplessness. He can no more change the taste of his heart from the creature to the Creator, than he can change his organic taste for the kinds of food that are set before him. He may force himself to that which is nauseous to his animal palate, but he cannot divest it of its nauseousness; nor can he bid his spiritual palate

to relish the hallowedness of Sabbath, however much he may compel himself to the drudgery of its manifold observations. The anatomy of his moral frame would need to be reconstructed, ere such a revolution of taste could be made to take effect upon it; and this he can no more do, than he can newmodel the anatomy of his morbid frame: And thus it is, that while quite a possible thing to keep the Sabbath in the style of a most sour and unbending formalist—it is no more possible for man to keep it in the style of a free and joyful and affectionate worshipper, than it is for a man at his own bidding to make all things new, or for man to be the author of his own regeneration.

It all resolves itself into the distinction between the spirit of love and the spirit of legality. Could you exchange the one spirit for the other, then would you turn Sabbath from a day of constraint into a day of cheerfulness. You never will get the better of your distaste for the religiousness of Sabbath—while you look upon God in the light of a jealous taskmaster, and yourselves in the light of bondmen who have an allotted task to perform, and by rendering all the items of which you eke out the fulfilment of a stimulated contract. It is this accursed spirit of legality which turns Sabbath service and every other service, into a heartless thing of distaste disquietude and most unproductive anxiety; and never will this day be kept aright, till, out of the new-born desires of an evangelized heart, it be kept, not as a fast to afflict the soul, but as a feast to regale it—not as a service of

desert for which you obtain the friendship of God, but as a service of grateful commemoration in return for the friendship that has been already proffered, and already been accepted of. You will not know what it is to have a religious, and, at the same time a free Sabbath, till you have embraced the offers of a free Gospel; and then all will be light, and liberty, and enlargement; and the cold obstructions of legality will give way from the labouring bosom; and the opportunity of meeting with God as your undoubted friend will be prized and courted—when the opportunity of meeting with Him as your rigid and unrelenting exactor, would be looked to with feelings of timidity and distrust and heavy alienation. It is the Gospel which refines and elevates the whole style of our obedience. It is the Gospel which turns it from the extorted drudgery of a crouching fearful superstitious slave, into the ready services of attachment. And as it is saying much, on the one hand, for the doctrines of grace and atonement and righteousness by faith, that it is the acceptance of these which forms the stepping-stone from service in the oldness of the letter to service in the newness of the spirit—so it is saying much on the other hand for Sabbath, and for its title to rank among the institutions of Christianity; that, instead of a mere positive and ceremonial observance, which ought to be expunged from our more enlightened economy, there is not one other precept of the decalogue that admits of being more evangelized, or of having a brighter and more beautiful radiance of celestial grace and celestial glory thrown over it. The services of Sabbath

upon earth, form the very nearest approximation that can be made to the current and every-day services in Heaven. He who does not love them loves not God. He who droops in weariness under the exercises of Sabbath, has nought before him but a dismal prospect of eternity. There is none admitted to Heaven, to whom Heaven were a dull and melancholy imprisonment; and there will be no mid-way territory like our present earth, between the Heaven of the redeemed and the hell of the rebellious. It forms indeed an emphatic argument to flee from the coming wrath, and to flee for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel—that it is not only on this ground where forgiveness and a free acceptance are awarded; but on this ground, and on it alone, can we learn to love that law which we aforetime hated, and to rejoice in those observations that we aforetime resisted and trampled upon. And if you indeed long for such a revolution in your taste and in your desires, as that Sabbath shall cease to be an oppression, and become to you a day of hallowed and honourable enjoyment—never cease to fix your regards on Christ crucified, till, through Him, all your legal apprehensions have given way, and you can rejoice in God as indeed your faithful friend, as indeed your reconciled Father.

And this seems to be the right place for adverting to a very common aphorism that is constantly on the lips of worldly men—at one time in the form of reproach against the seriousness of decided Christians, and at another of vindication for their own levity; and that is, that religion was never

meant for gloom but for enjoyment—that Christianity is always in her best style, when in the style of cheerfulness—that, in her strict, and precise, and puritanical aspect, she is the scourge and the terror of our species—and that it is only by the relaxation of this aspect, that she is put into accordancy with the real spirit and character of Him who has drest nature in smiles; and who, God of love as He is, can have no sweeter incense to ascend to Him from our world than the happiness of a grateful and rejoicing family. And thus it is, that they would seek for countenance to their own vain, and giddy gratifications—in pleasures and amusements, not where God is recognised, but in the midst of which God is utterly forgotten; to that merriment of the heart which is inspired, not by any cheering and at the same time accurate thoughts of their heavenly Father, but to that merriment which has its foundation in the thoughtlessness of merest unconcern and vacancy. The maxim is a true one, but they utterly misconceive its application. Religion is indeed the minister, not of gloom, but of enjoyment; but of enjoyment only to them, whose hearts have been so touched as to be attuned to the spirit and the feelings of sacredness. The genuine style of Christianity is that of cheerfulness; but the way in which it breathes cheerfulness into the soul, is, not by altering its own character for the purpose of accommodating itself to the tastes of the unconverted, but by altering the tastes of the unconverted, through the renewing process which they are made to undergo, to its own uncompromising and in-

variable character. The maxim is just; but not the slightest authority does it give to the glee, and the gaiety, and the joyous companionship, of Sabbath profanation. To rejoice *in* God is a habit of the soul, not merely different, but diametrically opposite to the habit of him who rejoices *without* God; and all the zest and vivacity of whose pleasures, any visitation of seriousness would instantly put to flight. The maxim most assuredly is just, and bears with emphatic condemnation on the weary and ever-doing formalist—who toils at his Sabbath duties, with a hand most punctual to their fulfilment, and a spirit fretted and galled as if by the felt burden of so many painful and ponderous austerities. The maxim that Christianity is a free and indulgent religion condemns this Sabbath drudge, but it does not acquit the Sabbath despiser; and then only does it find its satisfying application, when the first light of Sabbath morn summons the affectionate disciple to those kindred exercises of piety in which his heart is most fitted to rejoice—who goes not sadly but spontaneously to that which, animated as he is with the breath of another spirit, he feels not as a painful task, but as a precious opportunity—and like the Christians of old can eat his meat with gladness and singleness of heart, not because like those who take shelter in the maxim that religion is averse to melancholy, his delight is in sense or in unsanctified appetite; but because his delight is in converse with God.

Were heaven a mere paradise of music—then, to attain the capacity of enjoying it, one would need

to be a lover of harmony. It is conceivable that a musical festival, held at short periodic intervals, were the fittest preparation for obtaining and fostering the musical taste, and so for being happy in such an immortality as this. Those who had delight in the beauty of airs and the sweet concord of voices, would welcome the recurrence of every coming festival as they would a joyful entertainment; and, whether in the ecstatic pleasure felt during the currency of the performance or in the grateful emotions that were left behind it, would they bear an obvious countenance of satisfaction; and as, they sent forth the beamings of a regaled and recreated spirit, might they impress the conviction upon many, that those men who are the most strenuously bent on their education for Heaven are at the same time the happiest upon earth. Others again, without any taste for music whatever, may give an unwearied attendance to the festival; and determinedly support the whole irksomeness of its uncongenial confinement; and, utterly against the drift of their own native tendencies, sit out the oppressive hours of a heat and a noise that are well nigh insupportable; and all this too on the imagination, that heaven was to be conferred upon them, as the payment of wages for all the painfulness and self-denial of this unvaried regularity. But alas! when they get to the heaven of our present supposition, music will be the only reward that shall meet them there. That music which so sickened and fatigued them in time, will be all the entertainment they have to look for through eternity: And who does not see by such an illustration

as this, that the Sabbath formalist will miss the happiness of both worlds—unhappy here because drivelling all his days at a work that is utterly uncongenial to his spirit; and unhappy there, because, even should he enter within heaven's gate and it be shut upon him, he finds himself in the midst of that very work, which, though a delicious treat to others, was always to him a reluctant task, and the feeling of which still will turn the paradise in which he dwells into a dull and everlasting imprisonment. Now, though it be the happy and not the reluctant disciple of music who can rejoice in the musical heaven, that is not to say that he who is only happy in other things will ever reach it—that he who prefers the liberty and fresh air of the general world to the lessons of the recurring festival, will, because happy in his own style here, be in fit preparation for the happiness of another style hereafter. And neither does it follow, ye gay and unreflecting men of the world, because like unto the best and highest of Christians in being cheerful, you will ever sit down with them as the partakers of a cheerful eternity. Your happiness is of sense, and theirs is of spirit; and the paradise for which they are training by the exercises of the weekly Sabbath festival, instead of a mere paradise of music, is a paradise of sacredness. And think not ye men, in all whose joys and pursuits there is the secularity of a world that soon fadeth away—think not of assimilating the reckless hilarity of your bosoms, to the heaven-born joy that glows in the bosom of a spiritual Christian. Or despisers as ye are of that Sabbath which to him is the

source of hallowed and heavenly delight, that ever you, with your present habit, will realise any other condition than that of being left without pleasure and without a portion through eternity.

SERMON XIV.

THE ADVANTAGES OF A FIXED SABBATH.

"Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years."—GAL. iv. 10.

THERE are two distinct grounds, on which works in religion are appraised at a low or rather worthless valuation in the Bible, and either rejected or denounced accordingly. The first is when they are offered as the price of our justification in the sight of God; as an equivalent upon which the Lawgiver is challenged for the honour and the regard that are due to righteousness; as an acquittal on our side of that bargain where the obedience of the creature forms one part, and the good will of the Creator forms the other part of the stipulation that is betwixt them. A work may be entitled in certain respects to the designation of good; but when this good work assumes the character of purchase-money for eternal life, and in so doing assumes that the thing which is rendered by man is in the reckoning of the divine law, satisfactory value for the thing that is given to him by God in return for it—then does the Bible utterly hold at nought, the most laborious, and, perhaps, when looked to in another view, the most holy and estimable of all human performances. This is a point upon which the gospel earnest to enlighten man

as to the worth of his acceptance with God, and as to the worthlessness in regard to merit of his own proper pretensions to it, will descend to no compromise whatever with the vanity or the deceitful imaginations of our fallen species. Acceptance with God is most liberally held forth on the footing of a present to the sinner; but it is most firmly and tenaciously kept back on the footing of a purchase by the sinner. Still, however, it was bought for us; or rather after it had been forfeited, it was redeemed for us, and at a ransom too, altogether commensurate to its value. There was a price given for it; but that price is neither in whole nor in part the contribution of the sinner himself. He is welcome, if he will, to God's favour. Nay, he is welcome to this favour by being put into possession, if he will, of a positive right to it; but then he must understand that it is not a right conceded to him, because of any claim of merit whatever in his own performances. He must learn more justly to estimate the value of this right to the favour of a God of holiness; and that it cannot be rated according to the righteousness of man, but according to the righteousness of Christ's holy atonement and holy services. To cheapen the right of man to Heaven's reward down to the standard of man's obedience, were to degrade to the same standard the righteousness of God. And thus to sustain the dignity of God's character, does the gospel disown, and repudiate man's works, when accompanied with the plea for divine favour, as their just and adequate remuneration.

But there is still another ground on which works

are computed at a low valuation in the Bible—and that is, when, either in themselves they are devoid of true moral excellence, or serve not in their tendencies to refine and to strengthen the principles of our moral nature. If the work in question carry in it no indication either of love to God, or of love to man,—if there be in it no character of spiritual worth, or spiritual rectitude,—if, on tracing it to its first impulse from a principle within the heart, it betoken no becoming grace, or no duteous and incumbent morality, which should have its residence there,—if it neither flow from some good affection of the heart, nor be of any reflex efficacy in making the heart better,—in a word, if disjoined from the virtue of the inner man, it be a mere muscular or mechanical action, which affords an exercise, and gives a weariness to the body,—if it be merely some operose task, or some irksome confinement, laid upon the person, which, after it has been resolutely gone through, or resolutely endured, terminates in itself, and leaves no increase, either of godliness or of humanity, behind it,—if, instead of appertaining to any thing of mind that is devout, or upright, or generous, it be a work that can be done by a mere putting forth of the animal powers, and which, after its performance, leaves its laborious agent as little ennobled, in his spirit, above the animal as before—Then, on this ground, also, does the Bible hold it to be of as utter insignificance as the Saviour held the fasts, and the ablutions, and the whole fatiguing and fruitless ceremonial of the drivelling Pharisee. The former works were offensive, because, like many of the works of Popery, they assume a merit in

the sight of a highly exalted God. The latter works are offensive, because, like many of the works of Popery—as its penances, and its offerings, and its telling of rosaries—they have a meanness in the sight of every truly enlightened man. And as, to sustain the dignity of God, the Gospel holds out a countenance of rebuke towards those works of presumption on which we would found the claim of our legal righteousness for reward from the Lawgiver—so, for the sake of stamping a true dignity upon man, does the Gospel also hold out a countenance of rebuke towards those works of superstition which serve not to exalt or to purify the soul; and which varied or multiplied in every possible way, can never shed upon him who performs them either the grace or the lustre of a true personal righteousness.

But let a good work be delivered of both these ingredients—let there be neither an arrogated merit nor an inherent meanness in it—let the sinner who performs it inflict no offence on the unspotted righteousness of God, by offering it in price for that which nought can purchase for the guilty but an unsullied obedience and a perfect expiation; and, at the same time, let it be such a good work as serves, not to degrade, but to dignify, the performer, and as both marks and matures the real worth and growing excellence of his character—let it be free of all pretension to the reward which has been forfeited by man, and which a Divine Mediator alone can redeem to him; and, at the same time, let it, in its own substance, be free of all pettiness and abject timidity. And we say of works like unto this, that, so far from the Gospel lifting a voice of hostility

or casting a look of discountenance towards them, the very aim of the Gospel is to raise and to multiply them over the face of a new moral creation. The ultimate design which the Gospel has upon man, is not to redeem his person, but to renovate his character—not to lift off from him the weight of condemnation, that, under the deliverance, he may merely sit at ease; but that, thereby, he may be free to enter on a course of activity, along which he is ever approximating to the worth and holiness of the Godhead. For this, in fact, as the great and terminating object, was the whole peculiar economy of the Gospel raised. For this did Christ die, that the men of nature and of the world might become men of God, and be perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works. He, by His propitiation, hath made us partakers of the Divine approbation, but just that we might become partakers of the Divine nature. The justification, which He hath bought for us, is only the door of admittance upon that career of glory and virtue to which He hath called us. In the works which we do, let the merit of Christ be fully recognized, and the example of Christ, free as it is from debasing superstition, and bright as it is in all the graces of essential rectitude, be fully regarded; and the declared purpose of the Gospel is, upon the basis of such a humility, to build up every believer according to the similitude of this godlike pattern. It is not to damp his enthusiasm in the cause of good works, but to make him zealous of them. And, after rooting out the weeds, both of legal presumption and of worthless formality, from the soil of our nature—is it the

office of the Gospel to turn it into a well-watered garden, over which the eye of Heaven might rejoice in the reflection of its own likeness; and even the best and holiest of all be regaled by its sweet-smelling odours, and look down with complacency on its fair and pleasant fruits of righteousness.

Nothing can be more obvious in the epistle to the Galatians, than the express disinclination and dread of the Apostle towards certain works; but then these were works tainted with the alloy of both the obnoxious ingredients—as when a justifying merit was assigned to the rite of circumcision—and then, what did its performance avail to the great object either of purifying or of elevating the moral character? But with all his reprobation of such works, and after it might have been imagined by some that he had extinguished works altogether, mark how, ere he finishes his argument, they are made to re-appear upon the Christian, and to replenish both his heart and his history with the richest variety of excellence. It is, indeed, interesting to notice how the transition is secured in the Gospel from the humble to the holy,—how, if the creature will only renounce the worth of his own services, and seek unto God with the righteousness of Christ as the only price and the only plea he can offer for acceptance, how, from this abyss of felt and acknowledged nothingness, God will cause him to arise,—how, if he will only stand denuded of all that virtue which he deemed noble enough for the rewards of eternity, a virtue shall be inspired into his bosom, and made to effloresce upon his life, that really will ennoble him. And thus

it is, that while in those compends of Christianity which Paul left behind him, both the decencies of nature and the drudgeries of superstition are, in respect of their sufficiency with God, supplanted and set aside by the faith of the Gospel; yet he never fails to represent that faith as emanating an obedience of a higher order, that is free from both the vitiating admixtures—alike dignified in its character, and unpretending in its claims.

In the text too, there is a certain scrupulous observation referred to by the apostle, which his converts adhered to as a duty, but which he charges them with as if it were a delinquency. They observed days and months and times and years, annexing a religious importance to the stated acts and exercises of stated periods; and we have no doubt, labouring under distress of conscience, at any misgiving from the prescribed and wonted regularity. It is likely enough, that both of those ingredients which go to vilify a work, and to render it null and worthless, entered into this outward formality of the Galatians—that it gave them a feeling of security as to their meritorious acceptance with God, which nought but the Redeemer's merits ought to inspire; and that it further degraded the character of man, by reducing morality to the level of mechanism, and substituting for the obedience of a rightly strung and rightly actuated heart, an obedience like that of a galley slave who plies at his unvaried oar and moves in the one and unvaried circuit that is assigned to him. Man was not made for this. He was not even made for the Sabbath; and neither surely was he made to go

through the seasons of his existence, like the figures upon an orrery. He was not made to square the movements of his person with the lines or the convolutions of a diagram—nor was it ever intended of this creature, endowed as he is with the noble capacities of thought and sentiment and spontaneous affection, that time should lay her arrest on the free-born energies of his nature, or subjugate him to the dull routine of her cycles and her epicycles. This may do for a piece of unconscious materialism, or it may do for a beast of burden; and the cruel task-master man has made it to do for the yoked and harnessed negro, who, day after day, toils on that beaten path-way of labour, to which a stern and unchanging necessity has compelled him. But shall the spirit of him who knows the truth, and whom the truth has made free, be laid under the bondage and the beggary of such grovelling services? There was something more than jealousy for the prerogatives of Christ's righteousness, which inspired the apostle's antipathy to the whole work and labour of the Galatians? We think that there was also a generous and high-toned ambition, that while to Christ should be awarded all the glory to which he was entitled, on man should be imprinted all the grace and dignity of which he was capable—that he should be rescued from the degradation of those poor and meagre and creeping servilities, which were stealing their entrance into the churches; and that for such paltry and pitiful rudiments, there should be substituted the light of a higher morality, the love and the liberty of the children of God.'

But then will not this expunge the Sabbath from the observation of Christians—that day which comes as invariably round to us as a lunation in the heavens—that day the keeping of which compels us to move in the dull uniformity of a circle; and which, instead of leaving him to the free aspirations of a heart that knows no control but that of high and heaven-born principle, would still reduce the man to an automaton? And does not Paul in the parallel epistle of Colossians, turn his argument to this very application? "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of Sabbath days." Does not he here set them utterly at large from all the prescriptions of the ritualist; and fearlessly commit them to the guidance of such principles, as are drawn from a loftier morality, and are addressed to the nobler feelings and the higher faculties of our species? Does not he call upon us to abandon altogether the walk of ceremonial observation for the walk of spiritual exercises; and is not the Sabbath levelled, and laid under the same interdict, with all the other drudgeries of the Pharisee or the formalist? Were it not accordant then with the character, nay, even with the demands of the gospel that this institution should be henceforth swept away; and will not enough be left in its room, if the regenerated spirit when broken loose from its imprisonment, shall, in the genius of our better economy, expatiate without obstruction on the more ethereal field of its own fellowship with the upper

sanctuary, and of its own secret but seraphic contemplations?

Now though it be true that man was not made for the Sabbath, yet let it never be forgotten that the Sabbath was made for man. Man was not made to move in a precise orbit of times and seasons; yet times and seasons may be arranged, so as to subserve his use, and be the ministers of good both to his natural and moral economy. Were the keeping of the Sabbath a mere servitude of the body which left the heart no better than before, it would be a frivolous ceremonial and ought to be exploded. But if it be true that he who sanctifies the Sabbath sanctifies his own soul, then does the Sabbath assume a spiritual importance, because an expedient of spiritual cultivation. The suspension on this day of the labour or business of the world—its scrupulous retirement from the converse or the festivities of common intercourse—its solemn congregations and its evening solitudes—These singly and in themselves, may not be esteemed as moralities; and yet be entitled to a high pre-eminence among them, from the impulse they give to that living fountain of piety, out of which the various moralities of life ever come forth in purest and most plenteous emanation. It is not that the virtue of man consists in these things, but that these things are devices of best and surest efficacy for upholding the virtue of man. Were it not for this subserviency, the Sabbath might well be swept away; but because of this subserviency, it not only takes its place among the other obliga-

tions of Christianity, but is entitled to that reverence which is due if not to the parent at least to the foster-mother of them all. If the Sabbath of any one of the primitive churches obtained not this homage from the apostle, it must have been because a Sabbath of ceremonial drudgery and not of spiritual exercise. And you have only to compute the worth and the celestial character of all those graces, which have been sheltered and fed and reared to maturity in the bosom of this institution, that you may own the high bearing and dignity which belong to it.

If it be true of man, that he can attain a loftier communion with his God, at those hours when the din and urgency of the world are away from him; and that a season of reading, and contemplation, and prayer acts as a restorative to the embers of his decaying sacredness; and that the voice of a minister, when prompted by the Spirit from on high, and aided by the sympathies of all who are around him, can often send the elevation of heaven into his soul; and that it is on those evenings of deep and lengthened tranquillity which the footstep of intruding companionship does not violate, when the nurture and admonition of the Lord can descend more abundantly on the hearts of his children, and when the calm and the unction of a holy influence may be most felt in his dwelling-place—then Sabbath, which, from one end to the other of it, teems with these very opportunities, instead of ranking with the holidays of idle superstition, will be dear as piety itself to every enlightened Christian; and to it, in the most emphatic sense of the term, will he

award the obeisance of a divine and spiritual festival.

And on this principle too, may the Sabbath be rescued from that contempt which the text, in denouncing the observation of days and of times, would appear to cast on it. It is true, that it is a periodic festival, and that man was not made for periods. But this does not hinder that periods may be made for man. We have already affirmed, that Sabbath work is good for man to be engaged in, because it is a work of sacredness; and the remaining question is simply this, Whether will man do more of that work, if left every day of his life to the waywardness of his own desultory inclinations, or if a certain recurring day shall be cleared of this world's concerns and companies, and he be reminded, that the business of religion is its peculiar destination? It is a sound though homely maxim, that what may be done at any time is never done; and on this principle alone, it is good that a day shall be fixed upon—casting up at equidistant intervals, and on which the people of the land shall feel themselves more strictly and pointedly summoned to the work of intercourse with God and of preparation for eternity. It is good for man that he is not left in this matter to his own caprice and his own listlessness—that whether he wills it or not, Sabbath should recur upon him at its own periods, and proclaim an authoritative halt on the business of the world—that this day, ushered in if you like with the sound of bells, should announce itself to his very senses as a day of sacredness—that it should give out another echo than that which

falls upon the ear from the general buzz and action of week-day employments—or even that in the morning silence of our streets, and that hallowed peacefulness which overspreads the landscape, it should have its own marks and its own mementoes to characterise it. We put it to the plainest understanding, whether, with such an arrangement, more of business will not be transacted with Heaven, than if man were left to steal the hour he chose from the bustling urgencies of his business in the world. And on this ground singly, though there were none beside, would we say of our Sabbath, that, unlike to the days and times which were observed by the crouching devotees of Galatia, it is worthy of the homage of the most enlightened ages, for its wise and merciful adaptation to the laws of our moral nature.

And the maxim that what may be done at any time is never done, applies with peculiar emphasis to every work against which there is a strong constitutional bias—where there is a reluctance to begin it, and the pitching of a strenuous effort to overcome that reluctance, and the pleasant deception all the while that it will just do as well after a little more postponement—a deception which, as it overspreads the whole of life, will lead us to put off indefinitely; and this in the vast majority of instances is tantamount to the habit of putting off irrecoverably and for ever. Now this would just be the work of religion when shorn of its Sabbath—a work to embark upon which Nature has to arrest her strongest currents; and to shake her out of her lethargies; and to suspend those pursuits to

which by all the desires of her existence she is led most tenaciously to cleave; and to struggle for the ascendancy of faith over sight, and of a love to the unseen God whom the mind with all the aids of solitude and prayer so dimly apprehendeth, over the love of those things that are in the world, and whose power and whose presence are so constantly and so importunately bearing upon us. And will any say that in these circumstances, the cause of religion is not bettered by Sabbath, that weekly visitor coming to our door, and sounding the retreat of every seventh day from the heat and the hurry and the onset of such manifold temptations? It is not with dissipation's votaries that we are pleading this cause. But let us know, ye votaries of business, are ye able to preserve in your spirits through the week such a flavour of God and godliness, as to make you independent of any recruits that a Sabbath might afford you? Does sacredness so keep at all times its undisturbed place and pre-eminence, amid the turmoil of those many secularities by which you are surrounded, that any one set and specific time is not needed, on which, at a distance from the besetting world, you might relume that lamp of heaven in the soul which was ready to expire? Or if the time were left to your own discretion, are such your longings after a spiritual atmosphere, that you would be ever sure to make your escape to it, when like to be lulled or overborne in an atmosphere of earthliness? It is true you may lift up your hearts to God when you please—and even amid the thickening occupations of the market and the counting-house,

is it possible that many a secret aspiration may arise to Him. But how often is it that you would so please, and tell us on your experience of the past, what, if all days were alike, would be the fervour, or the frequency of such aspirations? How often does the sense of God intrude upon your hearts in company; and how much of it do you carry abroad in the walks of merchandise; or if there must be occasional retirement for the keeping up of religion in the soul, and the time and the opportunity were left altogether to yourselves, would there be actually as much through the week of the work and preparation of the sanctuary as a Sabbath could comprise? We appeal to every practical understanding, whether it is not better, that a time has been appointed, than that the time should have been wholly abandoned to our random determinations; and that God's Sabbath should come to us, than that we should be trusted to find our spontaneous way to sabbaths and parts of sabbaths of our own? If in some hour of frenzied innovation our week were thrown into disorder, and our whole remembrance were obliterated of that day which has been consecrated by the observance of former generations—all the piety would depart from the land, along with all the Sabbath punctuality of our venerable forefathers. If this sanctuary, which has hitherto been fenced around from the outer court of week-day employments, were ever trodden under feet by the Gentiles, it would not be the sacredness within that should spread itself abroad over the whole mass of human existence; but the secularity from without would rush through the broken wall, and

appropriate to itself the territory of holiness. The spirit of the world would engross and domineer over those last remnants of time which it had violated. The Sabbath of human life may be like the fleece of Gideon, when it was dry on all the earth beside, and the dew of heaven was upon it only. But we are not to expect, till the millennium perhaps has come upon our world, that it shall be dry only upon the fleece while the dew is upon all the ground; nor, should this day of solemn services be expunged from the history of man, are we to think that it shall offer any other aspect than one wide and unalleviated waste of earthliness.

We have already, though but briefly and incidentally, adverted to another benefit arising from a fixed and regular day for the services of piety. It brings a concert and a common understanding along with it. And this shields every family retreat from the inroads of boisterous acquaintanceship; and lays the alone effectual interdict on the calls and distractions of business; and not only throws a canopy of defence over the solitude of our private exercises, but affords to us a public and a social religion, and enlists the very sympathies of our nature on the side of sacredness, by impressing upon whole multitudes one consentaneous movement to the house of prayer. And there is a touching power even in the visible insignia, wherewith, from this circumstance alone, the sabbath of Christians is decked and signalized—in the holiday costume, which is worn like a dress of ceremony to her honour—in that shut and barricadoed covering, which stretches along all the doors

and windows of merchandise—in the suspension of human labour, and that general hush over the face of the world which marks the season of its deep and serious repose. This is all the fruit of a conventional understanding among men, which nought but the authority of a sabbath law could have rendered universal; and it is a fine poetical delusion, that even the lower animals of creation, together with its mute and inanimate things, partake in the stillness and solemnity of this hallowed day. It is indeed a most pleasing and allowable fancy—nor can we refuse our admiration to the lines which have so beautifully and with such tenderness expressed it:—

> Calmness sits thron'd on yon unmoving cloud.
> To him who wanders o'er the upland leas,
> The blackbird's note comes mellower from the dale;
> And sweeter from the sky the gladsome lark
> Warbles his heaven-tuned song; the lulling brook
> Murmurs more gently down the deep-worn glen;
> While from yon lowly roof, whose curling smoke
> O'ermounts the mist, is heard at intervals
> The voice of psalms, the simple song of praise.

But our main desire ought ever to be, not to regale with beauty, but to urge you with a sense of obligation. And, now, having endeavoured to rescue the sabbath law from the imputation of its being a paltry ceremonial; and to recommend it to the homage of enlightened minds; and to establish it in a rank co-ordinate with the highest principles of our moral nature; and to prove, in exception to the apostolic censure passed on the scrupulosity of the Galatians about days and months and times and years, that our sabbath, punctually though it does come round as clock-

work, stands nobly and liberally aloof from all the ignoble characteristics of a drudging and mechanical observation—what now remains after the argument is finished, but to press it home upon your conscience, that you turn this day to all the high uses and facilities of which it is so abundantly capable? If it secure the retirement of your person from the world—let this be followed up by the escape of your spirit from the world's cares and the world's vanities, and by its busy exercise with those eternal realities which in the throng of ordinary life are so little thought of. If it open for you the place of solemn congregation—see that you forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, and let the intense devotedness of your hearts through the week to all that goeth on in the haunts of business, rebuke its many flights and wanderings on the sabbath from all that goeth on in the house of prayer. If it afford you the quiet leisure of evening with your household—let it be your care to redeem the sacred opportunity; and let not the neglected souls of your children, be so many frightful vouchers on the day of reckoning, of the many neglected sabbaths that you have spent upon earth. To whom much is given, of them much will be required; and on this principle your sabbaths, these precious gifts of God to man will have to be accounted for. And O, forget not, that if these have been nauseated in time, Heaven if you e'er were admitted there would be nauseated through all eternity. Sabbath is that station on the territory of human life, from which we can descry with most advantage and delight the beau-

ties of the promised land; and it is there, as if at the gate of the upper sanctuary, where we can command one of the nearest approaches whereof our nature is capable, to the contemplations and the doings of the saints in blessedness. There is nothing else but sabbath in heaven, and in hell there is no sabbath. Such is the character of these two realms; and judge for yourselves the state of human character that is suited to them—which is the likely abode of him who delights in sabbath, and altogether charged with its spirit, therewith impregnates and sanctifies the week; and which is the likelier abode of him whose taste the business of the week monopolizes, and who altogether charged with its spirit, therewith pollutes and desecrates the sabbath.

And if it be true, that to set apart a day in the week for the business of Christianity, both provides a greater security and adds a greater amount to that business—it is no less true that the cause is essentially served, by setting apart to the same object certain portions of each successive day. The great use of sabbath is to Christianize the whole life of man; but for this purpose something more is required than a weekly festival. There must be a daily repast; and we would extend the principle by which we have endeavoured to advocate the sabbath into an advice, that each day should have its specific hours for the readings and the prayers and the various exercises of sacredness. We know that this is a process which may be superstitiously gone through, and just as if man were made for the hours like a time-telling piece

of mechanism—and then would he come under the denunciation of my text on the churches of Galatia, or under that high-minded contempt which is now felt for the mummeries and the paternosters of a more modern ritual. But we also know that this is a process which may be most spiritually and intelligently gone through, and at given hours too, because hours were made for man; and he acting with the authority of an enlightened judge over the habits and tendencies of his own moral nature, and experimentally aware that what may be done at any time is never done, counts it the best of arrangements for the best of objects to have solemn hours for solemn performances. It is not that we want to lay you under stop-watch regulation—a matter, most assuredly, against which Paul and every sensible Christian after him would protest, as quite incompatible with the religion of liberty. But we want, and on a survey of the known laws and principles of our nature, to devise fittest and most effectual expedients for keeping the free and elevated spirit of this religion alive. It is surely a good thing to make use of such expedients; and our anxiety is, not that you do this thing at a given time, but to strengthen and to multiply the guarantees for its being done at all. The style of observation, which if terminating in itself, would be the grovelling of slavish and sordid devoteeship, might, viewed in its consequences, be generous and noble and altogether accordant with that higher cast of morality, which speaks the air and the spirit of our better dispensation. And, it is on this account, and on this

alone, that we lay the stress even of a religious importance on your morning and your evening sacrifices—that we bid you to the resolute observance of certain select portions of the day which you appropriate to sacredness, and which nought but overbearing necessity should ever tempt you to violate—that like those regular meals which recruit the body from the fatigues of business, you have also your regular occasions of fellowship with God, through prayer or through the Bible, for that spiritual aliment which might recruit the exhaustion of your hearts, when the urgencies of business have well nigh driven the sense of judgment and eternity out of them. On the principle that man was not made for traversing in regular step and order the successive spaces of a diary, but for a nobler purpose—we forbear to assign either the length or the frequency of these holy exercises. But on the principle again, that time and all its various successions were made for man, would we ask you in practice thus to divide and thus to journalise it—and that just for the noble purpose of sustaining in life all the functions of man's spiritual economy, of upholding his perseverance in that lofty path of well-doing, which leads to glory and immortality and honour.

And again do we confidently put it to our men of business, whether if there were not set times for God and his bible, there ever would be any time—whether the spirit of man can thus be trusted to its own spontaneous cravings for the bread and the water of life—or if there be any such periodic hunger in the soul as there is in the body, that

demands at short and frequent intervals of the aliment which is suited to it? The disease of a patient may call for regular air and exercise, and, such may be his indolence, that the stated hours must be prescribed to him, and the very assignation of the times may be the stimulus that secures his observance of them. And we all labour under a disease of the heart that calls for its frequent exposure and exercise in a spiritual atmosphere; and one sad accompaniment of the disease is its disinclination to the whole breath and feeling of heaven's temperament; and to overcome this, there may be a weight of authority in the very hours which the patient has laid out for his own observation. And, it is most rational and fair to bring in this, as an auxiliary influence on the side of religion. The theologian has as good a warrant for his punctualities on this matter, as the physician has for his. And thoroughly aware, therefore, though we be, that bodily exercise profiteth little in Christianity, while it is godliness alone which is profitable unto all things—yet still do we press upon you the religious keeping of a certain day every week, and of certain hours or parts of these hours every day; and for this single reason too, not that thy body may go through its set and regular prostrations, but that thy soul may prosper and be in health.

And, think not that business will suffer by the encroachments which we are now proposing to you. Think not that the elevation which a closet prayer leaves behind it on the heart, will transport away your attention from the manifold cares and opera-

tions of the counting-house; or that you will come forth from the exercises of the one, indolent and distasteful and alienated from the exercises of the other. The bible recognises no such disjunction. On the contrary it supposes that he who is fervent in spirit may be not slothful in business, and that in the departments both of work and of worship he alike serveth the Lord. A religionist is thought by some to be a visionary, who is in hazard of dreaming when he ought to be doing; and who must find it ill to combine his monkish propensities to devotion with the alert and wakeful and ever-varying activities of merchandise. But this does not experimentally hold. The very power and taste for order, which has led him to apportion his day between the labours of the sanctuary and those of ordinary life, he will carry with him into all his subordinate arrangements; and the strenuousness wherewith he abides by his hours of sacredness, will also keep him most pointedly faithful and alive to the discharge of all his incumbent secularities; and that sense of duty which impels him to the observations of his privacy, so far from being stifled by them, will be strengthened and recruited for the affairs of society; and the very alacrity of feeling which these spiritual communions have given to him, will impart a satisfaction and celerity and success to all the miscellaneous agencies that are before him; nor will his ever obtrusive consciousness of the eye that is above, disturb, but rather urge and exhilarate his industry the more—for he knows it to be an eye which has respect to his performances as well as

to his prayers, and that the genuine spirit which cometh to him from heaven is a spirit wherewith the whole of human life ought to be impregnated. It is thus that the time which is laid out on the work that goeth on in the chamber of retirement, so far from being lost to the work that goeth on in the chamber of common merchandise, may prove a great and positive accession to it. It excites instead of exhausting; and acting on the recorded precept of diligence in our callings, the spirit that we fetch down upon the world from the mount of fellowship with God, adds a momentum to the wheels of ordinary business, and not only stimulates but methodises all its managements. A kindred influence is caught from Him who is the author of order and not of confusion, and to whom the morning has been consecrated. The light by which the heart of the worshipper is thus visited, is not lost on his transition to this world's familiarities; but remains with him to guide the history of his day, and to shed a useful and pleasing distribution over all the doings of it.

And while we thus would propitiate the man of active life to a set time for the duties and the preparations of sacredness, we should also like the religionist to understand that the business, whether of his profession or his family, has its times and its seasons too; and he is not to practise any hurtful inroad upon these, even though tempted so to do by the strength of his spiritual appetite for spiritual joys and contemplations. It is doubtless a case of exceeding rarity; but some there are of more ethereal mould, who, for hours together, can

hold converse with God and be all the while in ecstasy—who, as if broken loose from the fetters of earthliness, and evolved on a beauteous field of light and liberty, can feel such transports, and breathe such ineffable delights, as if all the glories of Heaven had descended upon them—who, as if already borne upward to paradise, can, even in the body, taste of the seraphic joy that flows throughout that bright domain of love and of holiness; and who, feeling with Peter on the mount of transfiguration that it is good to be here, could fondly linger in the midst of a beatific imagery, at the sight of which all the cares and employments of this vulgar world were forgotten. The American missionary Brainerd, of all our modern devotees, could keep the longest and the loftiest on the wing: And from him therefore it is a testimony of exceeding weight to the lesson we have been labouring to inculcate, when he vouches for a regular distribution of hours, in which the business of the lower world might be provided for, and be made to alternate with spiritual exercises—when he vouches for this as conducive even to the prosperity of religion in the soul—when he tells us, that were it for nothing more than the health of our personal Christianity, it is well that the affairs of earth should have their turn, even in the history of him whose engrossing care is so to advance his sanctification, as that he may stand perfect and complete in the whole will of God.

After conceding thus much to the doings and the business of the world—after giving to the work of your merchandise, and to the work of your families,

the benefit of the principle that there is a time for every thing—suffer us to come back upon you who have hitherto occupied all your week-day hours with the throng and the thickening multiplicity of your week-day affairs; and demand, in the name of your best and highest interest, that not a day shall pass over your heads without its allotted time for the concerns of your eternity. We repeat it, that business will not suffer by your morning and evening sacrifice—that your ledgers will not run into confusion, though you should tie your unvaried half-hour's attention every day to the Bible—that your correspondence of penmanship with man will not run into a heavier arrear, because you have now instituted a regular correspondence of prayer with God. Time, in fact, is a talent given largely and liberally to us all; and it only depends on our own use and distribution of it, that we find in it an ample sufficiency for every thing. Be but resolute and orderly; and if, on the pretence of an overwhelming business, you have hurt or neglected the readings and the devotions of sacredness, summon up now such a principle of arrangement as shall provide for your daily converse with Heaven; and you will find, that, under the prolific virtue of such a principle, you will subordinate to your power all those complexities that are now so oppressive to you, and acquire a thorough mastery over that business of which you are now the jaded and the overdriven slaves.

SERMON XV.

THE ACCOMMODATING SPIRIT OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY TO THE SCRUPLES OF THE WEAK.

"Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."—1 Cor. viii. 13.

We have already affirmed what the two principles are, on which it is that a human work is held to be of low or worthless estimation in Christianity. The first is—when, offered as the price of our justification, it tends to bring down the honour of the divine law, by calling upon it to acknowledge, and to reward an imperfect obedience. The second is—when, destitute in itself of any moral or spiritual character, it tends personally to degrade man by substituting points in the room of principles; and loading him with the observations of a paltry ceremonial, rather than infusing into his heart the essence of substantial virtue. It is worthy of being remarked however. that the first of these ingredients is greatly more obnoxious to the Gospel than the second—that it can tolerate no infringement on the ground of our meritorious acceptance with God; and so, Paul resisted to the uttermost the practice of circumcision, when proposed by certain teachers to the church of Galatia, as indispensable to salvation. Yet the same Paul could tolerate this very

rite, nay even himself inflicted it upon Timothy, when the great doctrine of the righteousness that is through faith was not endangered by it. What he resisted when it trenched on a fundamental principle, he could, were this principle kept inviolate, give way to, on the ground of expediency. The very same thing which he opposed with all his might, when made to usurp a place of merit beside the righteousness of Christ—he was on certain occasions content to let alone, when only made to usurp a place of simple occupancy beside those other attributes of conduct or character, which make out the personal righteousness of man. When admitted on the first footing, it thwarts the whole spirit and design of Heaven's jurisprudence, that will not stoop to the recognition of any human work whatever, as being of any avail towards the acceptance of the guilty, and will be challenged on no other plea than the one and unmixed righteousness which Christ hath brought in. Whereas when some little matter of outward or circumstantial observancy is admitted on the second footing—it may at least be borne with as a harmless, though not esteemed as a very honourable visitor. Its presence, though it could well be dispensed with, may not exclude the presence of what is really good and graceful and desirable upon the character—just as the garb of Quakerism may be worn by the same individual, who wears along with it the piety and the patience and the uprightness and the primitive worth of Quakerism, with all the ornaments of its meek and quiet spirit which in the sight of God are of

great price. One may smile, or perhaps one may regret, that the stress of any religious importance at all should be laid either on the hue or on the pattern of vestments—and think that this question of bodily apparel, like that of bodily exercise, signifies but little. But who would ever think of any serious controversy about so downright a bagatelle; or who would not, if it softened antipathies or added to the amount of charity and good will between man and man, put on those very habiliments which have given so pleasing and picturesque a variety to this denomination of Christians? Did they assume to their peculiar dress the merit or the power, which belongs to the doctrine of Christ's righteousness, then Paul himself would have resented it as an aggression on the very foundation of our faith. But if it be only a way in which they think to adorn that doctrine, and a way that looks comely to their eyes, we believe that Paul would have let their taste and their peculiarity alone. He might have regarded it as hay or stubble lying on the foundation, along with the gold and silver and precious stones which had been deposited there, by men rich in the substantial graces of Christianity. But, instead of stooping to controvert the singularity, he, in all likelihood, would have postponed the question to that day, which shall try and declare every man's work, and manifest its real worth, whatever it may be. The man himself, standing as he does on the foundation, shall be saved. Yet all that was insignificant in any of his practices shall be consumed away into oblivion; and only that,

which has the attributes of enduring excellence shall stand—for only that is capable of being translated into the great and abiding society of Heaven, where nought other worth is recognised than what is lasting as the soul, and dignified as are the faculties of its moral and spiritual nature.

So that the very same observance which, in one view, is of such pernicious import, as, if admitted, would prove fatal to Christianity by sapping its foundations, might, in another view of it, be a mere innocent peculiarity, which could either be dispensed with or tolerated according to circumstances. This will explain all that might have else appeared incongruous or veering in the conduct of our Apostle. In his fourteenth chapter to the Romans, you will find the whole force and spirit of his understanding, put forth on the casuistry of points and scruples; and we have often done homage to the rare and admirable sagacity wherewith he has delivered himself in a question, which, of all others, is most apt to elude our efforts to unravel it; and that, just from the very unimportance of its materials, rendering it difficult to bring the light of any decisive or commanding principle to bear upon it. He was most thoroughly aware of the frivolity, in regard to substance, of all those doubtful disputations that related to meats or days or ceremonies; but never lifted the voice either of alarm or of authority on one side or other, save when an invasion was threatened on the ground of a sinner's acceptance. After having repelled this mischief, he looked to these various niceties, very much as a man of full stature and exercised discernment

would look to the peculiarities of grown-up children —in which, for the sake of peace and good humour, he might benevolently indulge them—or in which, for the still higher purpose of maintaining the ascendancy of his Christian kindness over their spirits, he most wisely and most willingly might share.

There can be no mistaking the opinion of Paul, as to who was the more enlightened Christian—he who for himself sat loose to the punctualities in question, or he who was the slave of them. It is he who is strong that eateth all things: It is he who is weak that eateth herbs. Yet we never saw the qualities of mind and of principle in more beauteous combination; nor, do we conceive how the vigour of masculine intellect can be more finely attempered with the mild and merciful and condescending spirit of the Gospel—than when the apostle lets himself down from that high region of liberty whither he had been borne on the pinions of a noble and emancipated spirit; and when he who could roam with a free conscience over the wide domain of nature, and fearlessly partake of all its bounties, recollected the tenderness of a brother yet labouring in the distress and imprisonment of many difficulties, and protested that he would not eat flesh while the world standeth, lest he make his brother to offend.

And there is a twofold mischief which the apostle avoids by this generous compliance with another's principle, even though he himself regards it in the light of a weak peculiarity. Should this brother be quite decided and tenacious of the scruple, that

he has raised in his own mind to the dignity of an essential obligation, then will another's liberty be matter of sorrow or concern to him, and the infliction of this painful feeling ought to be avoided, wherever it can be done with propriety—for, says Paul, if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Or, if he be not quite decided—if, diffident of himself, he be readily overborne by the authority of another—if, in deference to the judgment of the stronger Christian, he imitate him in certain freedoms of observation, about which, however, he has not altogether obtained satisfaction in the light of his own mind, then, there is still a struggle between the power of conscience and the power of example; and should the latter prevail, the man is led to do a thing, not from the impulse of his clear convictions, but in opposition to his labouring doubts, and thus suffers himself to be hurried into a transgression against his own sense of moral rectitude. And thus it is that a weak conscience is wounded—for on seeing him who hath knowledge sit at a kind of meat which he deems unlawful, his conscience is emboldened to take the same liberty; and through the knowledge of him who is enlightened, the weak brother perishes for whom Christ died. For though he has given way to the indulgence, it is not with his own faith, but in the mere following of another's practice; and he secretly condemneth himself in that which he alloweth; and whatever is not of faith is sin, whence he that doubteth is condemned if he eateth, because he eateth not of faith: And, so it is good, both on the principle of

following after those things which make for peace, and those things wherewith one may edify another—it is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended or is made weak. It is this which may invest with a character of very high principle, what else would have seemed a weak and wretched scrupulosity. It is this which may stamp upon it the dignity of the second law that is like unto the first, and give the grace and the loveliness of charity even to the imbecilities of superstition. On the person of him who is its trembling votary, they may look silly enough; but they gather into an aspect of nobleness on the person of him, who, instead of frowning as some would the driveller away, walketh by his side; and, tolerating the weakness for sake of the worth wherewith it is associated, can descend from the level of his own superiority, and stretch forth to this humble Christian the courtesy of his kind and respectful accommodations.

This suggests another principle in aid of all the others which have already been adduced on the side of Sabbath observations. You know that there is a certain style of Sabbath keeping, which is regarded by many as the best and most appropriate; and that this style varies in different countries; and that, in some of these countries there is a strong popular feeling of what the things are which are essential to the becoming sanctity of this day, and what the things are whereby this sanctity would be violated. Some could not without distress of conscience walk abroad upon the fields;

and some could not reduce their double to a single attendance upon the house of prayer; and some could not cast their eye over the columns of a newspaper; and some could not spend an hour upon a worldly visit, or so much as one moment upon worldly conversation. We have already as we think alleged enough of substantial argument for the solemn observation of this day, inasmuch as it is one of the unexpunged precepts of the decalogue—and inasmuch as every man of genuine Christian affections will love such a day, instead of feeling it a load upon his spirit—and inasmuch as a set and specific time for the exercises of piety insures a far larger amount of these exercises, than if they had been left at random to the spontaneous and desultory movement of one's own inclinations. And, to supplement all these considerations, does the text supply us with one more, the force of which must be felt by every man who is at all endowed with the philanthropy of the Gospel—and just felt the stronger, if by the lustre of his unquestionable virtues he has earned a confidence among men, and has the homage awarded to him of being both an ornament and an example of Christianity. He may without offence to his own conscience go forth on Sabbath among the beauties of nature. He may, endowed as he is with the glorious and generous law of liberty, to quell some anxiety that oppresses him, search for the article of news after which he is longing. It is even conceivable, that the withdrawment of himself from church into his own chamber, during the whole or the half of that time that is spent by others in its public services, might

on some particular occasion be good for his spirit; and that he, without one remonstrance from his own heart, could then fearlessly be absent from the house of God. Nay there might even occur to him in the train of accidents, such unlooked for urgencies of call or of intercourse, as would amount in his situation to a valid demand for worldly and secular converse—and that, too, on an hour that he else would have given to prayer and heavenly contemplation. Throughout all these deviations from the letter of many a rigid formalist, might this enlightened Christian be able to clear his way, with a spirit unhurt, because with a conscience unviolated; and had he only his own things to look at, then with love to the Sabbath in his heart, might he still take the liberty of a son of God with Sabbath in his practice. But this very love teaches him to look to the things of others also—teaches him, while at perfect freedom in his own conscience, to be the servant even of the weakest of his brethren. And should he know that his Sabbath walk; or his Sabbath converse with the world; or his Sabbath indulgence, though on rare occasions, in the news and the business and the secularities of the week; or even his disappearance from church in any one of its services, though the time were consecrated to the secret labourings of his heart with God—should he know that any one of these freedoms would, under the cover of his revered example, embolden another to trespass against the light of his own mind, and so wound that spirit which, not yet strengthened to the discernment of what was substantially good and evil,

is still over scrupulous and over sensitive about the externals of Christianity—Then in the spirit of our text would he feel, that what might else have been a mere insignificancy, was now impregnated with the very essence of gospel charity and gospel obligation—and, taking up the language of Paul, would he resolve to do none of those things while the world standeth, lest he should make his brother to offend.

You will thus perceive that the precise style and etiquette of Sabbath observation is, to a certain degree, a question of geography. The Christians of England, for example, have altogether a freer and more negligent Sabbath exterior than those of Scotland; and this is perfectly consistent with a substantial unity of spirit and of principle among them both. A Scottish religionist might on visiting, or on shifting his residence to the south, maintain without prejudice, either to himself or others, all the rigidities of his accustomed practice. But the English religionist, on coming amongst us, could not, without the hazard of damaging the principles of his new vicinity, retain the laxities of his. If the mind have long associated with a certain habit a feeling of deep and serious obligation, then the surrender of that habit were tantamount to a surrender of principle, and the conscience is vitiated. Higher elements are at stake upon the issue of such a contest; and though the scruple may be a downright futility in itself, yet the whole religion of him who entertains it, may by its violation be shaken to an overthrow. It may be so implicated in his heart with all the feelings of sacredness,

that the scruple cannot be torn away without the sacredness coming up along with it; and so the same authority which conjures a man out of his frivolous punctuality, might conjure him out of his faith altogether. The very same example which left untouched the Christianity of one neighbourhood, might shed a deleterious blight over the Christianity of another. So, that while without detriment to any passing observer, Wilberforce, from the lofty and exposed terrace of his habitation, might, in unison with every Sabbath feeling, inhale the freshness of its summer evens, and verily catch a sweeter influence from Heaven upon his heart, when he looked abroad on the peaceful glories of the landscape before him—yet might the same exhibition spread a pestilential virus, through the atmosphere of many of our northern parishes: And we leave you to estimate for yourselves what the cast of that delicacy is, which would lead this most tender yet most liberal of Christians, to forego the much loved liberty in which his own spirit could most fearlessly have expatiated—and tell us, whether it were narrow or it were noble, if, in his tour of recreation through our romantic territory, he, for the sake of the people's holiness, dearer to his heart than even the fond enthusiasm wherewith the face of nature is surveyed by him, he did on every seventh day suspend the enjoyment of her lakes and her mountains, and turn his Sabbath inn into a hermitage, rather than make the meanest of her peasantry to offend.

It is in this spirit that you ought to act. Beside all the previous considerations on behalf of

Sabbath, you must compute the force of your example upon others—and each should contribute the decorum of his own grave and regular observations, even though at the expense of self-denial to his own tastes, that he may help within the sphere of his influence to arrest the declining piety of our age. It is woful to think at this period of benevolent forthgoing, on the part of the higher classes among the habitations of the poor—how listless after all they are of the Christianity of our city multitudes—and what woful havock they do make, by their conspicuous departure from the gravity of the olden times, on the best and dearest principles of our land. And the mischief is not confined to its operation upon the brethren, or upon those who are already Christians, in causing them to offend, and so speeding them downward along the career of degeneracy. For this growing obliteration of Sabbath, and of all those solemn and impressive vestiges which wont to characterise it, tell with malignant effect, in perpetuating and confirming the heathenism of our outcast population. It were well, for the sake of those in whom the power of reflection is so nearly extinct, as to leave almost nothing but the external senses, by which to find a conveyance for serious or pathetic emotion into their hearts—it were well for them that Sabbath should be upholden in all its venerable distinctions, and should stand visibly out with the aspect of religiousness on its very forehead. It is not we think in the spirit of a blind fanaticism, but rather in the spirit of a philosophy which can look into the secret mechanism both of our moral and sentient nature,

that the opening on the Sabbath, whether of public rooms or of public gardens, should be resisted, as a measure of deadly import to the religion of the community at large; and on the same principle would we advocate that Sabbath police, which, without oppression and without violence, puts to flight those many desecrations by which the hallowed aspect of this day has been overborne. But our more immediate business is with you; and our present aim is, to lay the responsibility of the principle that we have now urged upon your consciences. Look not merely to your own things but to the things of others also; and fail not to keep up both a congregational regularity in the eye of your fellow-worshippers, and a household regularity in the eye of your family. These are sensible memorials which serve both to grace and to signalise this day of sacredness; and so multiply the influences, in favour of that great Christian institution, a reverence for which seems to be identified with a reverence for Christianity itself.

SERMON XVI.

ON THE AMUSEMENTS AND COMPANIES OF THE WORLD.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."—2 Cor. vi. 14—16.

Perhaps on no occasion does the Apostle evince a more delicate and discerning eye, than when pronouncing on the question of meet and allowable intercourse between his recent converts and those idolaters, who composed the great mass of the society around them, and with whom they were still connected by the ties both of neighbourhood and relationship. You see at once, how, strong in the important principles of the question, he could stand his own individual ground against all the scrupulosities of a weak and sensitive conscience. He for himself could eat the meat that had been offered to an idol—he could even have eaten it in the very temple of idolatry, and perhaps at the same table too with its deluded worshippers. What another Christian would have shuddered at as an

abomination, he could fearlessly have done; and it was not any conscientious tenderness about the matter in itself, but a charitable tenderness for the points and perplexities of the feeble-minded among the brethren, which led him to abstain from it. The act he regarded as nothing, or truly as much too insignificant for any strenuous or imperative deliverance from him upon its own account. But he took into account the effect of it, in the way of exhibition to other disciples; and how it might be matter of distress and difficulty to their hearts; and how it might embolden them to transgress against the light of their own conscience, and so be matter of defilement as well as of distress; and how it might be the means of bringing them more frequently into contact and exposure, with people who had no kindred quality of spirit or sentiment with themselves; and under the force of these considerations, does this free and firm and most intelligent casuist come forth with the expression of a resolve, the principle and application of which we have already tried to elucidate—"Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest it make my brother to offend."

In the text that has now been submitted to you, the apostle looks to the approximation in question between his disciples and idolaters under another aspect. Viewed as a mere bodily or external act, the eating with them of the same food, or sitting with them at the same table, he seems to regard as a point of indifferency, and to number with the all things which are lawful. But viewed not as the

juxtaposition of different persons, but as the juxtaposition of different minds or of different principles, he looks to the spiritual character and contemplates the spiritual result that is likely to come out of such a companionship, and seems at once to number it among the things which are not expedient. He seems to regard it as a most unequal and unseemly assortment of people, who are wholly unsuitable and heterogeneous the one to the other. Their mere presence together in the same apartment, and their mere sitting together at the same board, and their mere partaking together of the same dishes and the same viands—these deeds and these circumstances of materialism, would argue in the religion of Christ, the grossness and the littleness of materialism, did it lay down its specifications and its categories for things of such frivolous observation. But when we think of the kind of moral atmosphere that is sure to gather and be formed around every assembled company; and how each individual spirit that is there, contributes a something of its own character by which to tinge and to peculiarise it; and that person cannot be approximated to person, without mind reciprocating on mind; and that there be manifold avenues of transition from one heart to another, whether by the utterance of direct sentiment, or by the natural signs of the eye and of the voice, or what perhaps is most insidious of all, by a certain tact of sympathy with the general pulse of those who are near us and about us, in virtue of which the tone and habit of a party have a certain power of diffusiveness that tends at least to a community of feeling

among all the members of it—when we think that from these causes, there is a hazard that sacredness, by moving too near to the temperament of the region which is opposite, may sustain a blight from the withering influences of the contiguous secularity—then must we see that the topic on hand, instead of appertaining to the casuistry of mere circumstantials, holds by an immediate tie on the clear and intelligent morality of principle: And, we must again award to our apostle, the homage of a high and powerful illumination—when, saying at one time that an idol is nothing and the meat offered to an idol is nothing; he could say at another, that it was both hurtful and unseemly for Christians to associate with idolaters—between whom, in all the essential characteristics of the inner man, there was no fellowship and no agreement and no communion.

There seem to be two capital reasons why the men of a Christian spirit should not by choice, and as if prompted thereto by a spontaneous impulse of their own, associate with those of a worldly or idolatrous spirit. The first is, that there is really no congeniality between the two spirits. As there is the want of a common taste, so there is the want of common topics. The children of this world nauseate the favourite themes of the children of light; and the children of light hold to be insipid at least the favourite themes of the children of this world. For a man then to delight in the air and conversation of an irreligious party, bears on it the evidence of his own irreligion. It proves him to be of a kindred quality, with those who

have nothing in them that is akin to sacredness: And, the very facility wherewith his spirit can amalgamate with theirs—the very comfort and pleasure wherewith he can breathe in an atmosphere altogether tainted with ungodliness—the very circumstance of him not feeling out of his element, though in an element in which for hours together there has not been one sentiment exchanged that bears on the things of faith or of eternity—This ought to alarm him for his own state, as carrying in it the indication of its being a state in which nature still maintains great force, if it do not maintain the entire predominancy: And, if it be the apostolical symptom of having passed from death unto life, that we love the brethren, or love the society of Christian disciples—then may the love of another society, at utter antipodes with the former, administer the suspicion of a still unregenerated heart, of a still unsubdued worldliness.

But there is still another reason, distinct from the former, why there ought to be no gratuitous fellowship between the pious and the ungodly. The former reason is, that for a man to consort, and by choice, with the ungodly, argues that there is in him still a strong leaven or remainder of ungodliness. The other reason is, that so to consort with the ungodly not only proves the existence of a kindred leaven in our spirit, but tends to ferment it—not only argues the ungodliness which yet is in the constitution, but tends to promote and to strengthen it the more. The one reason why it is desirable that a man in quest of spiritual health

should shun an intercourse with corruption, is, that his very delight in that intercourse is in itself a most infallible symptom of spiritual disease; and the other reason is, that it not only indicates the disease, but serves to aggravate and to confirm it. And who can doubt of the blight and the barrenness that are brought upon the spirit by its converse with the world? Who, that ever looked on human life with an observant eye, can question the might and efficacy of that assimilating power, which every circle of society has on the individuals who mingle with it? Such, even among those who have been long under a process of sanctification—such is the downward tendency of the heart, that it is indeed a work of strenuousness to uphold its spiritual frame for a single hour; and the hazard is, that, on being laid open to the full tide of that worldly influence which descends upon it from an alienated company, the whole unction of its sacredness will take flight and be dissipated. It is altogether with the grain and tendency of our old nature, to fall in with the prevalent tone of nature's unrenewed children; and this old nature, though subordinated by grace, is not extinguished; and so, there is ever present in us, a principle of ready coalescence with the taste and spirit and affections of men who have not God in all their thoughts; and thus to bring this earthly ingredient of our constitution into voluntary contact with such men, is tantamount, in fact, to a voluntary exile or departure, on our part, from the living God. It is as if, by our own proper choice, we left the tabernacle of God, that we might dwell for a season

in the tents of iniquity; and as this, by our first consideration, bespeaks where the liking of the heart lies, and is therefore to be deplored—so, by our second, it is equally to be deplored, as carrying in it a most pernicious reflex influence upon the heart, tending most assuredly to deteriorate the gracious principle that is therein, if not to destroy it.

Both the one and the other of these considerations are directly applicable touchstones by which to try, we will not say the lawfulness, but at least the expediency, both of the theatre and of all public entertainments. Think of the degree of congeniality which there is between the temperament of sacredness, and the temperament of any of those assemblages which are now referred to. Compute, though it be only in a general way, the distance and dissimilarity that do actually obtain between the prevalent spirit of this world's amusements and the spirit of godliness. Bethink yourselves of any such tests as may help to clear and ascertain this matter; and perhaps one of the most effectual is, to recollect that one individual of all your acquaintanceship, to whom you would most readily award, and that in the most pure and holy and reverend sense of the term, the character of a saint; and on whose aspect, there stands out to your eye the most decided and unequivocal expression of saintliness. Then make an effort, and conceive of this very personage—either that, as one of the most delighted spectators, he drinks in the whole fascination of a scenic performance on the stage, and shares in the loudest peals of the mer-

riment that is awakened by it; or that, with all the ecstatic glee of the most youthful in attendance, he plays off his agility and elegance in the eddying circles of an assembly. We do not ask you of any unseemliness in all this arising out of age; but we ask, if there be not palpable, even to yourselves, a most violent unseemliness arising out of the profession and the character? Do you not feel immediately awake to the utter discordancy that there is between the imagined exercises of the man in secret, and the public exhibition that he now makes of himself? On your own impressions of human nature do you hold it possible, that a relish so decisive for the actings which are carried on in the temples of fashion, can dwell in the same bosom with a relish equally determined for the actings which are carried on in a temple of piety? Would you believe it of the man, thus the gayest of the gay, that he had spent his morning hour in rapt and hallowed converse with Heaven; or do you ever think, that he who bears in his heart a cherished love for theatric declamation and song, carries in it also love for the psalmody of Christian worshippers? Is it not then your feeling, that, by the transition he has made, from the chamber of prayer to the concourse of fashionable gaiety, his character has, even in your eyes, sustained a grievous desecration? And what is this to say, but that you hold the atmosphere of the one place to be of diverse quality from the atmosphere of the other?—that, yourselves being judges, there is a real and substantial opposition between the temperament of piety and the temperament of a dissipa-

tion, which, however refined, is at least utterly devoid of the breath and the being of godliness; that there is a certain want of assortment between the two things, in virtue of which you cannot imagine a great delight in the one, without some distaste or aversion for the other; and that, therefore, and of necessary consequence, the abandonment of oneself to the rounds of fashionable life, while it may imply no infraction in the outward act of a single specific requirement to be found in sacred writ, may yet most decisively imply an utter alienation of the heart from all sacredness.

Thus much, then, for the act of delighted attendance on public entertainments, viewed as the symptom of a state of spiritual disease; and then, as to the second point of view in which it may be regarded, that is, as a course by which the disease may gather strength and be aggravated—this also may safely be referred, we think, to your own feelings and your own experience. We have already presumed on the fact of your voluntary presence in the theatre or ball-room, and eager participation in their amusements, as being itself an indication, that, on the morning of that day, you had not reached in your closet to the heights of saintly or seraphic communion with the God of holiness. And the question remains, whether the glee and the giddiness and the splendour that you have witnessed and have shared, will send you back again to your closets in the evening, in better trim, if we may be allowed the expression, for another and more successful attempt on Heaven's sanctuary than before? The simple matter to be

determined is, will the dance, and the music, and the merriment, and the representation, and the whole tumult of that vanity through which you have passed, and in full sympathy too it is to be presumed with the joyous multitude around you—will these attune the consent of the spirit to the feelings and the exercises of sacredness? Would you say of any one place of fashionable gaiety, that it makes a good antichamber of preparation for that house of solemn interview, in which converse is held, either with the still small voice that is within, or with that God above who bids you sanctify Him at all times in your heart, and do all things to His glory. These are experimental questions; and perhaps the memory of some who are here present may serve for the solution of them. And if their recollection be, that the almost unfailing result of an evening of gaiety, was to be bustled and jaded out of all their spirituality—that the whole unction of religiousness had fled; and, if prayers were uttered at all, they were lifted up in the mockery of meagre and downright heartlessness—that, in truth, there was a general riot or restlessness of their internal feelings, which nought could compose but sleep, and sleep held under the unacknowledged eye of Him who never slumbers, and still kept His wakeful guardianship over the unconscious moments of that creature, who, for a season, had chosen to disregard Him—Oh, is it needful for us to suspend you any longer on the issues of a deep and doubtful casuistry—or will we not be helped forward by the responding of your own bosoms, when we say, that this cannot

be the habit of one who knows himself to be a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth—cannot be the habit of one who has tasked himself to the work of nursing up his spirit for eternity?

We have all along assumed these places of public and fashionable resort, to be innocent of any specific or tangible offence against the proprieties of human life, or the delicacies of human sentiment; and, on this assumption, the most favourable for them, have we nevertheless attempted to demonstrate, how utterly at antipodes they are with the soul and habit of one, who is singly aspiring after immortality. But should this assumption not be true—should it be found that in these haunts of assembled elegance, a regardless impiety is sometimes connived at, and sometimes a sensitive and high-toned delicacy is laughed out of countenance—should there, in the midst of all that disguise and decorum which signalises the present above the former generation, should there be the hazard of so much as one sportive effusion by which the most pure or the most pious ear could possibly be offended—Then the question instantly emerges out of all its difficulties; and the Christian, instead of having to grope his way through the ambiguities of a yet unsettled controversy, will recoil from the poisoned insidiousness, with the promptitude of as quick an alarm, as he would from the most direct and declared abomination.

Now, what is true of this world's amusements is also true of this world's companies. If there be risk, either with the one or the other, of being exposed to the language of profaneness or the lan-

guage of impurity, this were reason enough, without any lengthened or recondite argumentation, why a Christian should maintain himself at the most scrupulous and determined distance from them both. But it so happens, that like as the theatre, for example, has been refined out of much of its original coarseness, so a similar process of refinement has taken undoubted effect on the conversation of private society. And when the public representation on the one hand, and the household party on the other, have thus been delivered of every specific transgression—where is the harm, and where is the hazard, it may be asked, of our most faithful and repeated attendance on them? It is when every thing in the shape of distinct or definite impropriety is cleared away, that many feel as if the cause of liberty, both as to fashion's entertainments and fashion's visits, were restored to an impregnable standing-place. It is thought, that when the enemies of any indulgence have nothing specific to allege against it, they on that account have nothing substantial to allege against it; that in the lack of solid materials they have recourse on imaginative phantoms; and with their plea attenuated to airy nothing, all which remains to them is the fierceness of an irrational and intemperate bigotry, or a certain subtlety of argument that is far too ethereal for the grasp of an ordinary understanding.

Now, you will recollect, that, on the question of public entertainments, our reasoning, in the main amount of it, was directed, not against any specific violations of propriety wherewith they were

chargeable—but against them on account of their spiritual character and spiritual tendency. We affirmed, that, in virtue of that change which Christianity induced upon its converts, the once passionate votary of fashion would cease to be any longer enamoured of its dissipations and its gaieties; and that, simply from the willing impulse of his new taste, these old things would go into desuetude and then pass away. And then might this world's amusements be abandoned without any imperative deliverance at all upon the subject of them—not given up, because of any precept of Christianity that required the specific action; and yet at the same time given up, because of the power of Christianity over the affections. And one reason why it is so very undesirable to behold a professing disciple as intent as before in pursuit of gaiety, is, that it is the symptom not only of no change in his habits; but much there is room to fear it as the symptom of there yet being no change in his heart. And another reason of its being undesirable, is that, besides a taste for the amusements of the world being the symptom or the indication of a worldly spirit—the indulgence of this taste seems to fix and to strengthen this worldliness the more. We are not conscious of any thing mystic or unintelligible in all this. There may be a difficulty in replying to the interrogation—What is the crime of music? Yet would you feel yourself entitled to rebuke the scholar whose love for music dispossessed his love of study, and whose gratification of this appetite dissipated his mind away from all the preparations that were indispensable to his profes-

sional excellence. And in like manner it may be difficult to state what that specific thing is in which the criminality of the theatre or the ball-room lies —and more particularly, if refined out of all that is literally or outwardly exceptionable. And yet without any remote or scholastic process of ratiocination—may it be clearly made out, that these are among the earthly things, the liking of which is at diametric variance with the habit of him who has his conversation in heaven—that, without any departure from the wisdom which is soberly and strictly experimental, they may be denounced as a nuisance and an obstacle in the path of spiritual education —reprobated not dogmatically but reprobated intelligently, by him who with an eye fresh from the lights of observation, and well exercised in the phases and phenomena of human character, can pronounce on the whole atmosphere of fashion as being pervaded with the breath of a diverse spirit from the atmosphere of godliness; and lift up a true warning when he says, that the more you prosecute of this world's gaieties, the more you darken the hopes and enfeeble the preparations of eternity.

And, as it is with this world's amusements, so may it be with this world's companies. It may not be possible to single out that one enactment of the statute-book which by any specific act, or by any specific expression has been trampled upon. There may be none of the excesses of intemperance. There may be none of the execrations of profanity. There may be none of the sneers of infidelity. There may be none of that foolish

talking, which to use the language of the apostle, is not seemly or convenient. It is true, that neither the doctrine nor the devotional spirit of Christianity may have contributed one ingredient throughout the whole of the evening's conversation. Yet all may have been pure and dignified and intellectual—or if not a very enlightened society, all at least may have been affectionate and kind, and free from any thing more obstreperous or jovial than what a simple light-heartedness would inspire. And, then, the gravelling question is put—where is the mighty and mysterious harm of all this? By what magic of sophistry, will you fasten on such a familiar and oft-acted companionship, the atrocious characters of carnal and ungodly and anti-christian? What are the principles on which so bland and amiable and domestic a looking party are to be stigmatized as a party of unregenerates? And are we to be shocked with an affirmation, in every way, so transcendently revolting—as that in a scene often realised at our own tables; and enlivened by the humour and hilarity of our own choicest acquaintances; and still more endeared by the smile and the sparkle, and the engaging loquacity of our own children—there is nought but the tainted atmosphere of corruption; and that we must shun the infection of such a circle, as we would that of so many reprobates or unbelievers who are ripening for the society of the damned.

The intelligent Christian will not fail to recognise in all this vehemence, the very repugnancy that is felt in the heart of a worldly yet respectable man, when the minister tries to urge and to pursue him

with the demonstration of his utter sinfulness. It is a thing not felt and not understood, by the conscience that has not been spiritually awakened, to the rightful ascendancy of Heaven's laws over all the desires of the heart, and all those affections which it charges with revolt and idolatry, simply because the things of sense have seduced them from God. There may not be one member of an assembled company, who has not much that should endear him to our most kind and complacent regards—whether as the honourable citizen; or as the benignant matron of the party; or as the joyous and free-hearted companion, whose very presence lights up the expectation of pleasure in every countenance; or as the son, who though now verging upon manhood has never yet cost his parents or his sisters a sigh, but who all of them rejoice in the opening anticipations both of his prosperity and his worth; or finally, and to complete our sketch of this happy and harmonious assemblage, may we advert to those lovely infants, who are permitted for a season to shed a beauteous halo of innocence and delight over the scene of enjoyment. And again, it may be asked, is it the mandate of stern and unrelenting theology that all this shall be broken up; or at least that it shall be shrunk from by its own votaries, as if charged with the noxious elements of a moral or a spiritual pestilence? Is it for Christianity to look with the hard eye of a Gorgon on this living scene—peopled as it is with the best family affections, and with all those feelings which flow in grateful circulation around a gay and generous companionship? Or can it at all be endured that the grace

and embellishment and heartfelt charms of society shall thus be scared away; and that too, at the bidding of a principle the reason and authority of which we cannot comprehend?

You will thus perceive that by meeting our antagonist in all his plausibility and in all his force, we have landed ourselves in what some may regard as a task of no common difficulty—which is to steer our way between the truth of what Christianity affirms regarding our nature, and the tenderness which Christianity feels towards every individual who wears it; or to prove of orthodoxy that it is not only sound but amiable. You will further perceive, that we cannot advance a step upon this subject, without taking the essential principles of the gospel along with us. And it ought to reconcile the hearer to a greater length of disquisition on the one topic of conformity to the world than might else have been tolerated, that thereby the fundamental doctrines of our faith might obtain a new enforcement, when thus carried out to a new and generally interesting application. Think not then that we are lavishing an enormous amount of time and labour barely on one of the subordinate moralities of the New Testament—for in truth there can be no substantial or satisfactory management of the question, without settling it deeply upon an evangelical basis, and repeatedly appealing therefrom to the highest and most peculiar principles of the evangelical system.

It must not be disguised then, that, with all the attractive qualities which each member of the company referred to may personally realise—it is quite

a possible thing that there be not one trait or tincture of godliness on the character of any one of them. They may all be living without God in the world; and deriving though they do all the moral and all the physical gracefulness which belong to them from the hand of the great human architect, He may be utterly forgotten; and by a tacit but faithful compact during the whole process of this conviviality, all thought and all talk of the ever present Deity may for the season be abandoned. It is said in one of the old prophets, that they who feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. Now, how we ask would the topics of any of our every-day companies appear in the book of Heaven's remembrance? What sort of document would you frame, by taking a full and a faithful record of its conversation? It may not be licentious, it may not be profane, it may not be enlivened by so much as one touch of scandal; and yet withal be just as remote as possible from sacredness. If it be from the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh, and out of the whole mass of the utterance that has been poured forth, not one sentence was heard that bore upon religion or eternity—what can we infer but that religion or eternity has not been in all their thoughts? God by common consent has been shut out from the party altogether, and has been as little regarded and as little recognised as He would have been in a region of atheism.

So you will observe that it is just with our fashionable parties, as it is with our fashionable amusements. Both have been much purified of late years from all that is directly revolting or abominable. Both may be animated with that play of heart and of humour, which is quite accordant with the kindliness of nature. All the feeling, and all the fancy which circulate there, may be in perfect unison with those best sympathies, which go to cement and to sweeten the intercourse of human society. And yet, the whole breath of this fair society on earth may be utterly distinct from the breath of the society in Heaven. In the very proportion of its freedom from that which would alarm or repel a sensitive delicacy, may it in truth be the more pregnant with danger to the souls of the unwary. It may only engage them the more to the things that are beneath, and alienate them the more from the things that are above. And thus is it a very possible thing, that, in simply prosecuting your round of invitations among this world's amiable friends and hospitable families, you may be cradling the soul into utter insensibility against the portentous realities of another world—a spiritual lethargy may grow and gather every year till it settle down into the irrevocable sleep of death—and, without one specific transgression that can be alleged of the companies among which you move, still may you be inhaling in the midst of them an atmosphere that makes you as oblivious of judgment, and as oblivious of eternity, as if you had drunk of the waters of forgetfulness. It may not be the air of vulgar profligacy, or abandoned licentiousness, but it may

be still the air of irreligion; and you, assimilating more and more to the temperament by which you are surrounded, in confirmed irreligion may expire.

This is the leading principle that is applicable to the question of indiscriminate converse with the society of this world. The love of it is opposite to the love of God; and the indulgence of the love of it serves to confirm and strengthen our enmity to sacredness the more. In as far as it goes to indicate the disease of a worldly spirit, it is to be regretted. In as far as it goes to cherish or to aggravate that disease, it should be forthwith relinquished by all who have at heart their preparation for the upper sanctuary. We do not say that even the most wakeful feeling of its danger, will lead in fact to a total abstinence from general company; or even that it ought to do so. But sure we are that it will very much abridge the intercourse; and that in every specific instance when it is thought right or allowable to venture upon it, it will lead to the most vigilant guardianship—to the jealousy of a spirit that forewarns and forearms itself against the hazards of the coming party—to the strictest maintenance of Christian humility and holiness and love, during the currency of its dissipations and its blandishments—and finally, to a solemn reckoning upon its effects and its influences, after that the season of its exposures has gone by.

We think it right in stating our comparison between the influence of this world's amusements, and that of this world's companies—as we have not disguised or extenuated the former, as little to shrink from giving a picture of the latter equally aggra-

vated and equally alarming. Nay, we are not sure but that it has greater power than the other to confirm the spiritual lethargy, and to steal away the heart into a pleasing oblivion of God and godliness. The show, and the festival, and the great public entertainment may more violently discompose the spirit out of its religiousness for the time; and, acting by successive assaults upon the frame of our personal Christianity, may at length demolish it altogether. But we can conceive the disciple to be more upon his guard against a danger so direct, and so palpable—and thus better able to withstand the shock of a hostility, that renews its attacks upon him at given periods, and does so with the full-blown note and circumstance of preparation. We can conceive of him, that, even though present among the tumults and the gaieties of the public entertainment, he may come off more unhurt, than from the polite and placid circle of a very kind yet wholly unchristian society—when mind comes vastly nearer to mind; and so the assimilating power of man upon his fellows, acts with tenfold advantage and effect; and is besides inconceivably heightened by that rapid interchange of thoughts and feelings, which takes place in conversation. And complaisance sits in smiling supremacy there. And cheerfulness which the introduction of an ungenial topic would at once put to flight, has her post of long and well established occupancy there. And who can withstand the pleasing illusions of all the glow, and of all the graciousness, which are current there? And thus it is, that the very kindliness of nature may beguile the spirit into a sweet forgetfulness of the ever pre-

sent Deity. All sense of religion is charmed away from the heart, soothed and satisfied as it is amid the sweets of youth or generous companionship: And if it be a likely thing that the occasional atmosphere of a playhouse, pealing aloud with the thunders of merriment and applause, shall storm the human bosom for a season out of all its piety—then know it to be a still more likely thing of the daily atmosphere of many a parlour, that, lighted up as it is with smiles and perfumed with the incense of mutual reverence and regard, it may stifle into irrecoverable death that piety which the other might only at intervals scare away.

And what gives additional soreness as well as subtlety to this oft recurring mischief, is, that it may not only injure the Christian, but may cause him to reflect the injury back again on those who are around him. Let him have but the name and the authority of religiousness—let it be held enough by the many that they reach the standard of his observations—let his example be quoted as the measure of a safe and sufficient imitation; and then let them witness with what kindred delight, he can give himself up, and that for hours together, to a scene of unmingled earthliness. Let him there exhibit a full and approving sympathy with the joy of creatures who have no joy in God, and share in all the busy interest they feel, about topics more paltry and ephemeral still, than is the passing world they tread upon. Let it be seen how willingly he can disport himself among fellow men, who, if his Christianity be true, are on the brink of a fearful lake, from whose devouring billows there is no

other way of escape, than by the living faith and thorough regeneration of the gospel. And after all this, will it be said that no damage is sustained by human souls, from this man's easy connivance at the ungodliness of the world; or from his complacent toleration of those parties by whom a sacred or scriptural utterance would be felt as a most unseemly and most unwarranted intrusion, and so put a sudden arrest on all that hilarity which they had met to indulge in? Think you not that the cruel delicacy of this man's silence about the cares and concerns of eternity; and the countenance that he sheds by his presence on those meetings of conviviality, from which by tacit but unviolated compact religion is alienated; and the free abandonment of himself to the trifles, or at least to the temporalities which form the all wherein the carnal and the unbeliever can expatiate—think you not that these will serve to reduce still farther in the eyes of men the high topics of immortality?—and will they not foster the delusions of that practical infidelity which so abounds among us?—and do they not tend to satisfy that heart, which, did it feel as it ought, would be all awake and in disquietude about its state of condemnation?—and do they not lend a most pernicious sanction to the whole habit and history of creatures, who have taken up with the world as their resting-place; and, engrossed with the bustle of its companies and its joys, never cast one look of earnestness to the eternity that is beyond it?

And now is it time for the question—that if an unbridled indulgence in this world's companies be to

the full as deleterious as an unbridled indulgence in this world's amusements—how comes it that in point of fact, a Christian, and of most entire and decided character too, may not unfrequently be seen to mingle with the one, and need never in a single instance lend his presence to the other? How comes it that the same individual, whom, because of his spiritual taste, you will never once detect within the walls of a theatre, you may, and without it is to be presumed any compromise of his taste or his principle, often meet even in a carnal or common-place household party? By what clue of reasoning is it, that we shall make out the consistency of the feeling that the atmosphere of the latter is just as tainted with ungodliness, as the atmosphere of the former—with the fact that he is never known to enter within the limits of the one, while he oft is compassed round with the other, and breathes it for hours, not perhaps with great positive satisfaction, but at least with toleration or even with comfort? Surely if the element of this world's companionship be as uncongenial with that of Christianity, as is the element of this world's more public and fashionable gaieties —then should not a disciple be just as much out of his element in the one situation as in the other; and let us know therefore, how you count it an unlikely thing that a Christian should ever be found to take part among the diversions of earthliness, when you affirm of him, that, actually and historically, he may at times be found among the societies of earthliness?

The great principle by which this whole obscurity is unravelled is, that there is a mighty difference between the act of your going voluntarily forth up-

on temptation, and the circumstance of temptation coming unsought and unasked for upon you. The first sort of encounter is by your own will; and you have no warrant for believing that you will be upheld in safety, against a hazard which you have presumptuously dared. The second sort of encounter is by the will of Him who has placed us among the duties and events, each of his own neighbourhood; and we do have the warrant for believing, that we shall be upheld in safety against a hazard into which we have been providentially brought. The man who looks with heedful jealousy to his way, will not rush upon temptation. But still God may suffer him to be tempted, though not beyond that which He will enable him to bear.

Now this, generally speaking, is the difference between a public amusement, and a private company. Both may be alike uncongenial with godliness—nor may it be possible to inhale the spirit, and catch the prevalent tone and sympathy of either, without dispossessing the heart of all sacredness. But to be in contact with the one, you have speaking in the general to make the originating movement. To bring you into contact with the other, there are a thousand foreign urgencies that have their origin without, and which come upon you in the attitude of passiveness. That you be in the theatre, there must be a spontaneous forth-going on your part; or if you did not originate the proposal, you could easily, still speaking in the general, and without offence have made your escape from it—so that if there, you are there because you choose; and, whatever seducing influence may be in this place of

entertainment, you have voluntarily approached or presumptuously braved it. That you be in the private society, may be the effect not of choice, but of circumstances—a trial not of your own making, but a trial brought upon you by the arrangements of Providence—an exposure which in itself may be fully as hazardous as the other, but still an exposure that instead of courting you rather would have shrunk from, had it not been for some call of necessity, or even some call of obligation which you could not otherwise have conscientiously disposed of. For, take notice—there is all the difference possible as to indication of character, and all the difference as to security against any pernicious operation on the character, and all the difference as to the will and countenance of Him with whom in every footstep of your history you have to do, between the movement adopted by one who at his own bidding goeth out of his way, and the movement impressed upon one by the manifold besetting influences which meet him on his way. And who shall say, that, by one sweeping and summary act of rejection, all these influences are to be cast aside? Who shall say that it is the part of the Christian, to shut his door against the stranger that has been thrown upon his courtesies?—or distantly to scowl on all the conviviality which take place within the circle of his unconverted relationship?—or even fearfully, as if in superstition, to absent himself from those festivities which are made subservient to the plans and the consultations of merchandise? The path of every heavenward traveller is beset with difficulties—yet it is not his part to vault them, by one single act of

rapid and resolute energy; but to walk and to feel his way through them, with wisdom and prayer to God and much circumspection: And most assuredly of all, has he failed of hitting the exact proprieties of his condition—if the aspect he bear among his fellows, be that of a morose and repulsive and unconciliating gruffness; or if he so wear the badge of his profession, as to disguise from the eye of the world the great characteristics of Christianity, as the religion of kindness and the religion of liberty.

It is no infringement upon a man's liberty, that he is led by the impulse of his own taste; and so, with a taste that disinclines him from the society of the world, does a Christian, in the full exercise of freedom, keep aloof as much as he may from companies, with whose spirit and with whose favourite themes he cannot amalgamate. Neither is it any infringement on a man's liberty, that he is led by the impulse of his own fears, to shun an exposure by which he may hurt or hazard the very dearest interest that his heart is set upon; and so, still in the full exercise of freedom, may he cultivate to the uttermost his distance from a society, the very breath of which serves to taint, and to reduce the spirituality of all his affections. Thus far, you will allow that he keeps on the high walk of reason and principle—not at all recoiling like a man of points, and with slavish or superstitious fearfulness, from the mere act of worldly association; but reflecting like a man of sense and observation on the spirit or tendency of the act, and laying down the general habit of his life accordingly. And it is thus, that

wherever he can, he will of his own independent choice seek for his companionship among the godly rather than among the ungodly; among those who are travelling to Heaven, rather than among those who grovel in the dust of this perishable earth; among the generous aspirants after the holiness of a divine nature—rather than among those who care for nothing higher in grace or in virtue, than the equities of human business or the civilities of human neighbourhood. Yet it may often happen, that, instead of him seeking after the companionship, it is a companionship which has beset and closed around him—instead of a temptation upon which he has voluntarily gone forth, it may be a temptation into which he has been providentially brought, a thing not of will, but of circumstances; which, though he had no call of duty to create for himself, yet, now that they are created for him by another, he has no call of duty to make his escape from—but the contrary. And it is here that the strength, and the sacredness, and the liberality of the Christian spirit, will come into manifestation; and he will prove how nobly he stands exempted from any wretched scrupulosity about the act, and that all which concerns him is the enlightened guardianship of his own heart against the consequences; and most gratefully will he mingle with the society to which the hand of some fortuitous, or perhaps some duteous necessity, has brought him; and decorate the scene not upon which he has entered but rather to which he has been carried, by the living light of his own Christianity and the loveliness of its moral accom-

plishments; and, walking to those who are without in a wisdom that he has already prayed for, will he be upholden through all the delicacies of an intercourse, which, at times, it may be necessary to have, but which he knows it were most hazardous to indulge in. And thus, while called upon to love not the world, and to dread a contamination to his own spirit, should he for the sake of its gratifications, volunteer his presence among its companies; yet, through these very companies will he pass unhurt, when either the calls of duty or the necessities of business have so involved him. That world which, at all times, it were unlawful to court, ceases at these times to be a forbidden territory; and, teeming though it does, with the elements of moral evil, it is often by the arrangements of Providence the field of Christian warfare—that appointed scene, among the duties and the dangers and the difficulties of which, the soldier of Jesus Christ is trained and disciplined for the services of eternity.

The apostle Paul seems, in one of his epistles to the disciples at Corinth, to look on their occasional convivialities with the men of the world as unavoidable; and that it was not possible entirely to give these up, without going out of the world altogether. The honest experience of those who now hear us, will be the best authority which they can consult upon the question—whether this is or is not in some measure still the place and the predicament of Christians—whether it were possible, or even right, to cut with the intimacies of relationship—or if the urgencies of business do not indis-

pensably require the acts of festivity, as well as of fellowship, with unconverted men—or if it were doing a service either to one's own spirit or to the cause of that gospel which he is bound to adorn, did he keep morosely aloof from the traveller who has been recommended to the protection of his roof or the politeness of his courtesies. Bring a free and a fearless spirit to these investigations. Never lose sight of Christianity, as being, not a religion of acts, but a religion of principles; and that whenever the latter can be guaranteed from injury, it regards the former with a most smiling and benignant toleration. Be very sure that there is a way of being rightfully acquitted of all this casuistry, without escaping from it into a cell or a hermitage. This is an alternative from which our great apostle most evidently declines; and it is in striking conformity with his deliverance* that our Saviour prays on behalf of his disciples—not that they should be taken out of the world. He only prays that they should be kept from the evil of it.

* See 1 Cor. v. 10.

SERMON XVII.

ON CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION.

"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." —COLOSSIANS iv. 5, 6.

WE trust, we may have now made it abundantly palpable, that a man of truly spiritual taste will not cultivate a voluntary and habitual companionship with the children of this world, save from an impulse of duty, or from the design of rendering to them a Christian benefit. But whether he move forward to their society or not, their society will often close around him; and that, in the course of opportunities which he ought not to decline, and under providential arrangements that he neither can nor ought to control. And, when thus implicated, the question is, how shall he acquit himself so as to walk in wisdom to those who are without?

In the observations which follow, we shall restrict ourselves to the wisdom of speech as distinct from the wisdom of conduct; and that the apostle had the former chiefly, if not exclusively, in his eye we hold to be apparent, from the second of these two verses—"Let your speech be alway with

grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

From this passage it would appear, first, that mere sincerity and strength of Christian affection are not enough of themselves, to carry us aright in our walk and conversation to those who are without. There is much to be gathered from the selection which the apostle here makes of that one attribute, by which he would have the deportment of Christians towards those who are without, to be characterized. It is the attribute of wisdom. It would appear that zeal is not enough,—that affectionate earnestness is not enough,—that the fervency of our desires for the glory and interest of religion, is not enough. Had we nought to do but to resign ourselves to the impulse of these, as the sole actuating principles of our converse with the world,—then might we just give unrestrained and unregulated vent to that abundance of the heart, out of which the mouth speaketh. And thus, many would be the effusions of warmth and of vehemence that should break in upon the ear of general society; and daring, as well as frequent, would be the inroads of Christianity on those festive boards, where now, the topic were a very strange and before unheard-of novelty; and often, would there come forth at random, from the lips of some honest and desirous believer, such an utterance, as, in our present habits of intercourse, would lay a freezing arrest on the whole current of the foregoing conversation, and leave the adventurous zealot to fill up, as he may, the pause of silence and astonishment that he himself had created. Such eruptions were certainly

more frequent amongst us, but for the delicacy, or rather, perhaps, the cowardice of Christians. Yet there is a higher principle than either of these, which should go a certain length to repress them. The words that are uttered should be words in season. The man who speaks them should know how he ought to speak. So, that the apostle does not confide the matter of religious conversation to zeal or earnestness alone. And, accordingly, in the text, he singles out wisdom, if not as the impelling, at least as the guiding principle, that should preside over this important occasion of frequent and almost daily occurrence in the walk of Christians.

Secondly, there might be an excess of talk upon Christian subjects to those who are without. If there be any wisdom that is more specially meant than another in this passage, it must be the wisdom of winning souls. Now, the zeal that would urge you onward to ceaseless and indiscriminate loquacity about religion, were directly in opposition to such wisdom. Whenever disgust, or irritation, or any feeling of annoyance, is manifested at the topic, there must be a material damage inflicted upon the hearer by persisting in it. For it is very possible thus to arm him into a more resolute and stout-hearted defiance of the whole subject; and to add to the number of those unpleasant recollections wherewith in his mind it stands associated; and, in a word, to make serious Christianity more the topic of his ridicule or his resentment than before. That there lies a limit somewhere to the freedom and the copiousness of our speech on the topics of

sacredness is evident, from such injunctions, as—"Give not that which is holy unto dogs"—and "Cast not your pearls before swine"—and, "If they will not hear you, shake off the dust of your feet as a testimony against them." It is thus, we believe, that many a Christian conversation is repressed in embryo—even in companies where there may be a few individuals whose heart is wholly toward these things. By means of a delicate and discerning tact, the surrounding taste and disposition may very speedily be ascertained; and the way may have been sounded to an opening, and found to be impracticable; and it may have been concluded, and most rightly concluded, that there was something in the general pulse of those about you, that was unsuited to serious conversation, and forbade the introduction of it: And, thus it is possible, that the man who never breathes more congenially than in the free circulation of Christian feelings and Christian experience, may hold it expedient to keep the aspiring tendencies of his bosom in check or in inaction; and that bent though he is on the honour of his Master's name, he may still in such circumstances count his best and fittest wisdom to be the wisdom of silence.

There are many reasons, why the topics of Christianity should not be pressed beyond a certain limit, on those who refuse to entertain them. It may often be distinctly seen, whether the effect may not be to harden their conscience the more; and to aggravate the guilt of all their previous resistance to the gospel; and to encourage those who are beside them, and perhaps not so established in

impiety as themselves, to join forces against the man who has thus gratuitously offered to jar, and discompose the society, and thus to cause that which is good to be evil spoken of, by transforming a thing of high benevolence, into a thing of offensive controversy. All these evils might be incurred by the heedless and premature introduction of this great concern as a topic of conversation. You must be aware of many companies, where the whole mischief which we have now specified, and much more, would be a certain result of the experiment in question: and this might serve to prove that along with a spirit of zeal prompting to the utterance of religious feelings, there should also be the vigilance of an enlightened wisdom to regulate, and sometimes to restrain it.

But additional to this, there is a very wide gradation in the amount of that welcome, which different people will give to Christianity, and in the kind of topics they are prepared to listen to with pleasure, or at least with toleration. Some will bear to be addressed on the highest mysteries of a Christian's experience, and can sympathise with the utterance of his most saintly and spiritual affections. Others without much experience, but with much earnestness, can suffer to be spoken to of the urgent and awful importance of the gospel, and to be told of its high demands on the attention of guilty creatures—who are so fast speeding their way to death and to the judgment-seat. Others who would recoil from any personal exhibition either of their feelings or their fears, would not refuse to take up Christianity, with that calmer sort of interest which

attaches to a matter of intellect, or a matter of speculation—and thus an opening may be had, and room for conversation may be found, in the doctrine of the Bible, in the meaning of its passages, in the evidence that there is for its authority and inspiration. Many more there are, who would decline from such an argument as this, but who would give their attendance throughout all those outworks of the subject, which might be denominated the environs of Christianity; and the man who is all things to all men, might, at certain moments of this excursion, along with the topics of patronage, or pauperism, or civil and ecclesiastical polity, give his timely thrust to the conscience, and make his skilful transition to the very essentials of that question, on which there turns the good of a sinner's eternity. But still you must perceive there is need for wisdom, as well as zeal in the whole management of this intercourse with human beings; and that it is not enough for the heart to be full of sacred affections, but that further than this, the way in which its abundance shall be discharged upon others, should be intelligently gone about. It must be quite evident that no good is done by the effusion of this Christian adventurer, unless he carry the willing regards of his company along with him, unless he have felt his way to a certain measure of acceptance for those high themes on which his heart is set most desirously; and that there are distinct intimations in the awkwardness or restiveness or embarrassed silence of the party, against which it were as utterly vain to attempt their religious good by talking of religion, as it would be to proselyte the

stones of the field, or preach among the rocks of the desolate wilderness.

Thirdly, there may be such a difficulty of management in this matter, as to justify the cultivation of an assiduous distance from the world. And you may now see perhaps more strongly than before, the principle which may be expected to regulate the fellowship of a Christian with the children of this world. It is not to be thought of him, that he will by the impulse of his own proper taste move himself towards a society, where he has no hope either of doing good or receiving it—that he should love to mingle in person for hours together, among those with whom there is no responsive mingling of hearts at the utterance of that name, which is most dear to him—that he should not feel in a state of exile, or of abandonment, when fated to a condition, where no door of access is to be found for those themes, which stand linked to his imagination with the fondest hopes and the highest glories of his existence. In every other department of human life, you see how they are men of kindred profession, and kindred pursuit, who draw most frequently together—how dull and listless a thing conviviality is with those, between whom there is no community of feeling or of interest—how the scholar of abstract and abstruse meditation, would droop as if out of his element at some joyous festival of gay and gallant military—or the mariner would sink into downright apathy and weariness, at a meeting of agriculturists. It is thus, in fact, that the various orders of acquaintanceship are formed—that likeness of habit and of condition is the great assimliating tie, which

associates men into intimacy together—that wherever there is the greatest alliance of taste, or of circumstances, then also there is the most frequent interchange of hospitality: And all we ask is allowance for the same peculiarity among the people called Christians—that, on the universal principle of men ranging themselves according to the sympathies of their kindred condition or character, it shall not be thought unnatural, if they, who are dying unto the world, shall often be found in close and separate companionship among themselves, and standing aloof from those who cling to the world as their only resting place. Let some hopeful and distant adventure be held out to our people; and a hundred families be tempted thereby to a purpose of emigration—you will instantly perceive a busier and more exclusive intercourse among them than before. They will leave to others the whole argumentation of home prices and home politics, and all that variety of home intelligence, from the feeling of which, and the interest of which, they are now upon the eve of a final disruption; and the urgent topics of the preparation, and the outfit, and the voyage, and the employments or the gains of that foreign territory on which they are to spend the remainder of their earthly existence—these will groupe our adventurers together into many a keen and separate conversation. And who would ever think of remarking this as an oddity that was at all unaccountable? And yet it is just on the working of the very same human propensities, that we can vindicate all the exclusion and all the illiberality which are charged upon Christians. Most happy

would they be, that the whole species were to embark on the same enterprise for heaven with themselves. But, if otherwise, you are not to wonder that these voyagers of immortality have much to say, that will be of mighty interest to one another, and of no interest to the world—that engrossed as they are with the preparation, and the outfit, and the splendours of that eternal city whither they are bound, they who thus walk by faith, and not by sight, should talk often together—that, save when the leadings of duty or of Providence are upon them, they should never feel moved to a frequent intercourse with those who are without by the leadings of their own inclination—and that but to gain more recruits to the expedition on which they have entered, they should seldom mingle in those societies where God is forgotten, and where all sense of eternity is suspended.

Fourthly, what adds to the difficulties of our walk among those who are without, is that while an excess of talk on Christian subjects may disgust them—there may be such a deficiency of talk as is tantamount to the denial of Christ. And what adds to the perplexities of a Christian disciple upon this subject is—that, whereas, if in general company he should say too much, he may injure the cause that he should labour to recommend—yet, if in the same company he should say too little, he may incur the guilt of denying the Saviour. He may deny Him by his silence. He, at least, if silent, abstains from confessing Him—and then to think of the appalling denunciation that whosoever

confesseth not Christ before men, neither shall Christ confess him before the angels which are in heaven. And it is often shame, too, that restrains his utterance—that shame of the Saviour as his Lord, which shall make the Saviour ashamed of him as His disciple—that fear of man which is a snare—that delicacy which recoils from such an exhibition of his feelings or of his faith, as causes him to falter from the intrepidity of a firm and consistent profession—that cowardice, which might not have shrunk from a gospel testimony under the threats of an inquisition in ancient Rome, but which will shrink from the same testimony under the terror or the tenderness or the undescribable restraints of a drawing-room in modern Christendom—that nervous imbecility which would not have succumbed at sight of the grim apparatus of martyrdom, but which does succumb to the might and the mystery of that spell, wherewith the fashion of this world hath subordinated all its votaries. It is the dread of his own treachery to Christ—it is the secret consciousness of a misgiving from His cause in the presence of its enemies—it is the felt urgency of the obligation to do all and to say all in His name, contrasted with that fearfulness by which he knows that he is actuated—These are what might often impel him to disburden his conscience, by breaking forth on the ears of an astonished party, with the utterance of his distaste for the world and the world's vanity. But aware at the same time that it is of mightier importance to win others than to relieve himself; and that he is bidden to be wise as well as courageous; and that he ought

not to outrage the feelings which he can possibly conciliate; and that his way is not clear through the mazes of a dilemma which he still finds to be inextricable—It is under the contest of these deeply felt and oft experienced difficulties, that many a conscientious disciple has retired to as great a distance from this world's majorities as he may—declining the general society that can be avoided, just as he would some missionary ground that is found to be impracticable—and praying for the guidance of the wisdom that is from on high, through all that society which he neither ought, nor is able to abandon.

Fifthly, we must not abandon in despair the cause of making a general impression on the world, even through the medium of this world's companies. And in the midst of all this helplessness, there is one thing which the Christian never must abandon—the cultivation of every opening for the Christian good of his fellow men. If in pursuit of this object, he have hitherto knocked in vain at the door of general society, he may retire for a season, but to arm himself with strength and wisdom for a fresh attempt on that which he yet has found to be impregnable. It is possible that he himself may not be ripe for such an experiment—not yet enough of Christian decision—not yet enough of simple dependence upon God—not yet enough of sacred benevolence in his own heart, which, beaming forth in unquestionable evidence on all whom he addressed, might propitiate their respectful hearing, to the urgency wherewith he bore upon them—not yet enough at ease in his religion, so as to come forth

spontaneously, and with the full command of all his resources in the face of resistance and ridicule. It may only be one man in a hundred, who could acquit himself of all the delicacies of such a task, or act the part of a Christian apostle when seated at the board of hospitality. But though there should be only of such a very few who are now hearing us, yet, let us give these to understand, that the vocation for which God hath accomplished them, is of importance as high, as that of those hardy adventurers who bear the tidings of the gospel to distant lands—that to carry the doctrine of Christ with acceptance into the heart of our alienated companies at home, were an achievement as much to be wondered at, as to carry it abroad among the deepest recesses of Paganism—that to cross the sea, and to penetrate the desert in quest of proselytes to the faith, is not an enterprise more daring, than to scale those moral barriers which lie around a polite and lettered society, and there to propound the terms and the mysteries of our faith, in the midst of an assembled audience. And, if one may judge from the aspect of the times, the day is not far off when a talent like this will find scope and matter for its exercise—when the demand for Christian information will become more intense, and the realities of the gospel will challenge a larger space in the affairs and the conversation of men—when the veil shall be lifted off from many eyes, and the things of eternity shall be revealed in all the commanding magnitude which belongs to them—and in return for the wisdom of those who are

the friends of Christianity, the Spirit shall subdue under them the will of its enemies.

Lastly, much is to be done through the medium of private and affectionate converse. For meanwhile, and in defect of the talent or the hardihood that may be requisite for tabling the matter amidst the collisions of general society—it were well if every devoted Christian laid himself out to Christian usefulness, on every occasion that he felt himself able for; and more particularly, if unfit to brave the exposure of himself on a wider and more conspicuous arena, that he distilled the sacredness of his affections through the privacies of individual acquaintanceship. Here too, often is there the barrier of a formidable delicacy in the way of a full and explicit communication; and never at times is it felt to be stronger than between the nearest of kindred; and it absolutely looks as if withheld by infernal sorcery, the man cannot though he would unbosom himself to those of his own blood, on the topic of their highest and mightiest concernment. And yet were this accursed incantation only broken; and did each mind step forth from its obstinate hiding-place; and could the one friend burst loose from all the restraints which heretofore had held him, and pour of his Christian fervency into another's ear—may it be found that the man whom you never could have arrested in the midst of other company, will when spoken to alone, offer a glad and grateful welcome to your message: And, precious reward of intrepidity and faithfulness, may we reclaim a brother from the error of his way, and cause Heaven to rejoice on a new accession to the great spiritual family.

And here we must remark, as an encouragement to more frankness and freedom than at present do obtain throughout society in the utterance of religious sentiment, that often, in quarters where it was least expected, is it found to be met, not with toleration merely, but even with thankfulness. It is, therefore, worthy of an occasional experiment, though it should be hazarded in companies which you fear to be most alienated. It is hard that while trade, and agriculture, and politics, and science, all find such ready and respectful acceptance in the converse of society—no place and no entertainment should be found for Christianity; but, for ought that is known previous to an attempt, this may be as much due to the despair of her friends, as it is to the dislike or resistance of her enemies. It were too much to try the establishment of a monopoly in her favour; but why, amid the free and abundant circulation of other articles, should this alone be treated as contraband? And therefore it were not amiss, that a man of sense, and colloquial firmness, should at times reconnoitre the party by which he is surrounded, and actually propounding that theme which is dearest to his bosom, should adventure himself on the currency and reception that it may meet with. Let it be done with ease —let it be done with breeding—let it be done, not in the spirit of fearfulness as if for the relief of an oppressed conscience, but done in the more generous style of one who loves the fellowship of his species, and should like to raise every member of it to the delight of his own exercises, and the dignity of his own contemplations. We are aware that with

all this to recommend it, the attempt may misgive, and a sudden arrest be laid by it on the flow and facility of conversation, and the adventurer be instantly made to feel as if the door of access was shut against him. But there are times, and there are places where it is otherwise; and where unexpected welcome is given to the utterance of seriousness; and where a responsive feeling is awakened, and room afforded for the lifting up of a gospel testimony; and delight both courteously expressed, and cordially felt at this novel style of entertainment; and the discovery made, that the general silence of this world's companionship on the high topics of eternity, may be sometimes as much due to the want of intrepidity in the one party, as to the want of disposition in the other. So that on this untrodden walk of Christian philanthropy, something may be achieved. "The field is the world;" and there may be places on the civilized region of it, more inaccessible, than on the most remote countries of its savage and unknown territory; and the ocean or the wilderness which separate from the latter, may not be of more difficult transition, than are the thousand artificial delicacies which obstruct the pathway of communication to the former. And, thus the zeal and the devotedness, and withal the wisdom of a most accomplished missionary, may be as indispensably called for, in a service which ought not to be neglected, as altogether unpromising; and, in the face even of its many discouragements, ought not to be abandoned in despair.

And let us specify one thing, which would do

much to clear and facilitate the way to such an enterprise as we are now recommending. Its heaviest obstacle by far, is the deep and the deadening silence that often ensues on the first utterance of a religious sentiment. The adventurer must be supported by the co-operation of your replies, or the experiment is abortive. That he should be left to sermonize at the board of free and equal companionship, is altogether out of the question. It is not a dissertation that is wanted, but a dialogue—a thing that is sustained by the play and the colloquial interchange of human sentiments—the reciprocation of mind with mind, insomuch that a contest with well-bred infidelity, were not half so insupportable, as this formal and ministerial harangue in the midst of a dumb-struck auditory. Were it but a question that marked the interest of the hearers, it might serve as a stepping-stone, and an encouragement to the process; and you cannot but perceive, how much out of keeping it were with the whole character and complexion of a party, if the speaker shall be abandoned to work his long and solitary passage through the still medium of a freezing and hopeless taciturnity. The thing in short demanded and felt to be necessary is, that a topic connected with Christianity, shall be taken up as easily and fallen in with as readily and prosecuted as freely, as any other topic of human interest or speculation: And just as the politeness of genteel and cultivated men forms, in general, a sufficient guarantee against the disturbance that might be excited by the acrimony of a heated partizanship in politics—so, under the shelter of the same guarantee, religion

in its piety, or religion in its great and essential principles, may be talked of, without involving the circle in the offence or irritation of its controversies. The thing may be attempted; but without the contribution of some such welcome and acceptancy as this, the thing is utterly impracticable. The very feeling of such a barrier, is intimation enough of the topic being a fruitless one; and, just because the moral clime is unsuited to it, that, to be productive of a blessing, it must be borne away to a soil which is open to receive it, where it may find the harbour of another circle of acquaintanceship, and be made to thrive in the atmosphere of another society.

Now, this were one good effect that should result from a more free and intrepid utterance on the part of Christians. There would then be a more clearly ascertained line of distinction between those who inclined to religious conversation, and those who disrelished it. There is nothing that one nauseates more, than the companionship of those who have their own favourite topics—for which he feels no taste, and upon which he can hold no intelligent sympathy whatever with those who are around him. Many of you must recollect how tiresome and disgustful it is—when the attentions of a whole party are monopolized by a few, whose peculiar likings or peculiar acquirements, invariably lead them to one walk of remark or argument, that is just as insipid to all the others, as would be the gibberish of an unknown tongue: and, be it for example, the jockeyship of field sports, or the politics of a city corporation, or some rare topic of connoisseur-

ship that none but themselves can either value or comprehend—you both see what a ready and rejoicing coalescence they have with each other, and at the same time, how ill they are fitted to amalgamate with general society. And it is thus that the intimacies of social life are formed; and, just as it should be, that the spectacle is held forth of men drawn into more close and separate association together, by the tie of their similar pursuits or similar predilections; and all we want is, that Christianity shall not be smothered under the weight of those many delicacies, which have interred her in deep concealment from the notice of society, and in virtue of which her friends remain unknowing and unknown to each other. It were right, that they, too, should feel their way to a common understanding; and be indulged in the free and frequent participation of their mutual sympathies; and should be seen aggregating together in clusters—even as you see men of a kindred character or kindred profession in all the other walks of the community. It is most true, that if they give way to the abundance of their heart in general conversation, they will leave many at a distance, and perhaps many as impatient and as distasteful of their presence, as you would be of those who are ever deafening their company with topics that no one savours, or no one cares for. But thus it is that the needful discoveries are made; and the men of a common taste find out one another; and, in obedience to the impulse of it, they naturally and freely resolve themselves into distinct circles of companionship; and the line of demarcation be-

tween the decided and the adverse comes forth into visibility; and, precious fruit of that more frank and fearless exhibition of our Christianity which we now recommend, would they who are hostile, spontaneously, and of themselves, fall away, and they who are friendly, as spontaneously groupe themselves into associations of willing and congenial intercourse.

And lest this should appear like raising a barrier of everlasting separation between the church and the world, let us here shortly evince the style of management that obtains, we have heard to a great extent, in the metropolis of British society. There, devoted Christians do associate more exclusively with each other, and keep far more distinctly and decidedly aloof from the minglings of general acquaintanceship, and maintain a sort of hallowed and secluded ground that does not lie open to the random invasions of those who are without; and yet is not closed round by a fence that is utterly impregnable. For the practice, as we understand it, is so to arrange the festive or the social party, as to comprehend a few from among the wide and general outfield of humanity, though not so many as to overbear its character of sacredness. Let but the preponderancy be secured for the Christian spirit and conversation of the meeting; and, up to this indispensable object, may admittance be granted even to the farthest off in alienation from the concerns of eternity. The experience is, that, however difficult for the friends of the gospel to face this world's majorities, with an incorrupt testimony and a pure or consistent exhibition in its favour—

it is not so difficult to charm, or even to assimilate the loose and scattered minorities of the world, when the collective influence of a number of Christians is brought, as it were, separately and piecemeal, to bear upon them. The very fact of their presence, their very acceptance of the issued invitation, may argue a degree of predisposition, which only needs to be fostered by the delicacies of judicious kindness, into an established attachment for the ways of peace and of true wisdom. So that it is not necessary to abandon the world to itself, or to lay a stern interdict on all its approximations. There is a way in which, consistently with all that has been urged or advanced by us, the very hospitalities of human intercourse may be made subservient to the evangelization of our species; and often when the voice of expostulation has fallen from the pulpit without efficacy, has it been found of Christianity that she has other graceful and happy exhibitions at command, wherewith to soften the heart of man out of all its prejudices—that what cannot be done by the verbal demonstrations of the minister, may be done by the personal exhibitions of worth and mildness that are frequently held out in the converse of private society. And, when religion is thus blended, as it sometimes is in the upper walks of life, with the fascinations of taste and elegance and literary accomplishment—such a union of saint-like piety on the one hand, with the polish and the ornament of finished cultivation on the other, has often sent forth an influence upon the beholder on the side of that gospel he wont to despise, which he has felt to be utterly irresistible.

SERMON XVIII.

ON CHRISTIAN CASUISTRY.

" Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."—
ROMANS xiv. 5.

THERE is a kind of minuter casuistry which it is extremely difficult to handle from the mere want of something very distinct or tangible to hold by; and about which there is the greatest degree of indecision, and that just from the loss at which we feel, to get any decisive principle of unquestioned evidence and authority to bear upon it—And, so it is, that even the Christian mind fluctuates thereanent, and exhibits itself upon this subject in a state both of vacillation and variety. For while one class of the professors are heard to declaim, and to dogmatise, and most strenuously to asseverate with all the readiness of minds that are thoroughly made up on the matters alluded to—there is another class of them who cannot assume this certainty without cause being shown, who must have something more to allege for the vindication of their peculiarities than the mere conventional Shibboleth of a party, and who wait till a clear reason approve itself to their judgments, ere they can utter with their mouths a clear and confident deliverance.

Some may have already guessed what the questions are to which we are now adverting. They

relate to the degree of our conformity with the world, and to the share which it were lawful to take in its companies and amusements. You must be aware on this topic of a certain unsettledness of opinion; while we know of none that wakens a more anxious degree of interest and speculation among those who are honestly aspiring after the right, and are most fearfully sensitive of the wrong in all their conversation. And if to tenderness of conscience, they add a certain force of intelligence, they will not be satisfied with a mere oracular response from those who seem to be somewhat, and who speak as if from the vantage ground of their long initiation into higher mysteries. They are prepared for every surrender, and are in readiness to follow fully wherever the light of scripture, or of argument may carry them; but this light is the very thing they want, and are in quest of. It is their demand for the *rationale* of this matter, with the difficulty they feel in reaching it, that has thrown them into a kind of harassment about the whole affair from which they long to be extricated. And neither in the magisterial, but unproved dictation of one set of Christians; nor in the yet unstable practice of another set of Christians, who are hovering about the margin that separates the church from the world, and ever tremulously veering between the sides of accommodation and non-conformity therewith—from neither of these parties in the great professing public of our day can they find repose to their spirits, because from neither, they have found effectual relief to the painful ambiguity under which they are labouring.

What has now drawn our attention more especially to this subject, is its strong identity in regard to principle with that question of Sabbath observation, which we have recently attempted to elucidate. The elements of Christian liberty and expediency, and charity, appear to be similarly involved in both, so as that we may avail ourselves of the same guidance as before, from the manner in which the apostle hath cleared and discriminated his way through the controversy that arose in his time about meats and days and ceremonies. Instead, however, of going the whole ground over again, we shall barely state, rather than argument, many of our positions—trusting for your concurrence to the recollection of what you may before have heard, and before have acquiesced in.

First then, when the giving up of the theatre, and the giving up of public places, and the giving up of the festive and the fashionable parties of this world, are laid down for the observance of the young disciple in the shape of so many distinct and categorical impositions—it is a very possible thing that he may be thereby misled into an utter misconception of the design and nature of Christianity. For these acts of rigid abstemiousness occupy the place of works; and the punctual fulfilment of these may minister the complacency of self-righteousness, and so land us in the capital error of transferring our plea for God's meritorious favour from the ground of Christ's obedience, to the ground of our own obedience. And besides, they are such acts as do not necessarily imply any graceful or elevated morality in the individual who has performed them. With him

they may be the mere heartless austerities of formal or Pharisaical devoteeship—the morose penances and self-inflictions of one who resolutely denies to his taste, that gratification which he nevertheless is still most desirously set upon—the stated sacrifices which are offered, not with but against the entire current of the soul, that pines perhaps in secret mortification after those jubilees of mirth or of splendour, which, at the bidding of a stern rigid and uncompromising puritanism, he has been taught to put utterly away. It is, indeed, a very possible thing, that Christianity may thus be made to wear another aspect than that in which she smiles so benignantly upon us from the New Testament —that instead of a religion of freedom, because her only control is that of heavenly and high-born principle, wherewith she rules, and by moral ascendancy alone, over her willing and delighted votaries, she may be transformed into a narrow system of bigotry, whose oppressive mandates of touch not, and taste not, and handle not, bear no relation whatever to the spiritual department of our nature—only galling and subordinating the outer man, while they leave the inner man as remote, both in principle and affection from the likeness of God, or the character of godliness as before.

It is for this reason that we think it greatly better, with every young inquirer at least, to begin at the beginning—to aim a blow at the root of his corruption, instead of mangling and lacerating at one of its branches—to go at once to the very essence of the controversy between him and God, even that he idolizes the creature, and with a heart set upon

its enjoyments, has cast the love and homage of the Creator away from him—instead of charging him with a matter of doubtful criminality, to put it direct to his conscience, whether the world, or He who made the world, have the most permanent and practical hold of ascendancy over him. After having reached his convictions on this point, and laid open to him the nakedness of his spiritual condition, we would tell him that the thing for adjustment at present was not the habitual attendance of his person upon places of public amusement; but the devoted attendance of his heart on the high places of a far more stupendous and engrossing idolatry, to which he was wholly given over. We should in all these cases feel inclined to forbear the casuistry of theatres and assemblies, and the various resorts of fashionable gaiety, as being really not the matter on hand. To make use of parliamentary language—we should be disposed on the starting of this topic, to move the previous question—or borrowing another expressive phrase from the same quarter, we should proceed to the order of the day. The point of immediate urgency, and that should be first taken up, is his general state with God. The charge to be first brought home, is not that he is occasionally seen in a room of public entertainment; but, of far more tremendous import, that the ground which he constantly occupies is a ground of alienation from God, and from godliness. The quarrel is not that he may sometimes be detected in one of this world's favourite haunting places—but that the world, with the full power of its seducing influences has at all times the pos-

session of his heart, that his only portion is there, and that there he has been living up to the present hour without any prevailing sense of God, or of eternity. In a word, we should like for the time being, to decline with him the ambiguous controversy about public festivals and public entertainments—and that, for the purpose of sounding in his ears the alarm of an actual, and a greater controversy that is still more appalling. In short, our indictment against him has only one article—not that he has been incidentally seen in places, which lie without the territory of sacredness; but that, from that territory, he is wholly an outcast, and a wanderer. With such an enquirer we should prefer dealing for the present among those solemn and undoubted realities, the very magnitude of which, both gives them an imperative power over the attention, and causes them by the eye of his mind to be more distinctly, because more forcibly apprehended. Thus, instead of trying to clear our way through the ambiguities of any subordinate question, we should like to reduce him—an arrested and a conscience-struck sinner to the question, what shall I do to be saved?—and would admit nothing else into our solution of it, than the mighty elements of his exile from God, and the way that God has taken to reconcile and to recall him.

Now, it is on the personal settlement of this question, that a great personal change takes place upon the enquirer—that a vista is opened up through which desires and delights that were before unknown are let in upon the soul—that there ensues a great moral revolution, in virtue of which,

what was before shrunk from either with dislike or with terror, becomes the object of a most attractive tenderness; and what was before the object of eager pursuit and of much loved indulgence, is now regarded with unconcern, if not with positive detestation. Many, it is true, who profess the faith of the gospel, evince no such translation into another habit and another history: But there are none who actually acquire the faith of the gospel—the tendencies of whose inner man are not thereby shifted, so as to point either in a diverse or opposite direction from that they did before. Other glories than those of this world's splendour now engage the affections; and other paths than those of this world's dissipations, are now the paths of peace and the ways of pleasantness. The man who before was of the earth and earthly, now breathes with his spirit of the air of heaven; and loftier to him than the highest earthly flights of poetry or song is the music of Heaven's psalmody. He now feels his kindred atmosphere to be in the house of prayer; and that time which wont to be an oppressive load upon the heart that ever sighed for relief from the burden of its own vacancy, he can now fill up, and most congenially too, with the labours of love and the works of righteousness. It may not, however, be with the fierce intolerance of a bigot, that he looks on the amusements of other days, but simply with the indifference of one who has found his way to higher and better amusements. In the new tract to which he has betaken himself, all that we behold, is the spontaneous emanation of a new taste—and not a rigorous or

reluctant compliance, with any of the rigorous proprieties of formal and common-place professorship. And should the result be, that he keeps himself from the ball-room or the theatre, this result is only one among the many; and but an humble corollary out of the operation of great and noble elements. Along the whole of that march by which he has been conducted, we see nought but the impulse of generous affections and elevated principles—nor in any step of the process, whereon the passionate devotee of this world's gaieties, has at length utterly and conclusively renounced them, is there one such character of moroseness or constraint, as would ill become the religion of liberty.

Secondly, this forms another reason why we feel so much disposed to avoid any thing like a dogmatic deliverance on the subject of this world's entertainments. It gives to the general eye an appearance of narrowness to our religion, which really does not belong to it. Better surely to impregnate the man's heart, first with the taste and spirit of our religion; and, then, if this should supersede the taste and affection he before had for the frivolities of life, it impresses a far nobler character of freeness and greatness on the change of habit that has taken place, when thus made to emanate from a change of heart—than when it appears in the light of a reluctant compliance with a rigid exaction of intolerance, the rationality and rightness of which are at the same time not very distinctly apprehended. Let the reformation in question, if reformation it be, come

forth upon the habit of the man in this way—as the final upshot of a process by which the heart has been reformed, as the fruit of an internal change that has taken place on the taste and on the affections, through the power of the truth that is in Jesus, and whereby all old things have passed away, and all things have become new. Better thus, than by a mandate on the subject, issued from the chair of authority. Better that it spring up, in kindly vegetation from the soil of the new nature, than that it be forced and driven forward at the stern call of an uncompromising or unmeaning dogmatism. Better that it come at will, as the spontaneous efflorescence of a previous change upon the inner man, than that without choice and without consent, it be laid as a yoke of bondage upon the outer man. You have heard of the new wine that was put into old bottles. The wine had not yet done with its fermentation; and the leathern bottles of these days, that had lost their elasticity and were altogether hard and unyielding, did not expand to the process, but were rent asunder and burst, so as that both wine and bottles were destroyed. And the same may often be the result of prematurely putting into an old and yet unregenerated man those new observations, which are in most pleasing accordancy with the whole desire and habit of an altogether Christian. The current maxims of professorship, about the total abstinence of his person from this world's gaiety and companionship, look to him as so many senseless and arbitrary impositions. The light of his mind does not yet go along with them. The high

and tumultuating spirit of the man is stirred up to a revolt, against an intolerance for which he cannot see the authority or the reason. He is galled and restive under the shackles in which he has been made to fester; and for no purpose which he can understand, as at all worthy of the self-denial that has been laid upon him. He will positively not bind himself down to the attitude of being so beset and harassed; and the danger is, that, in some fit of explosive impatience, he casts Christianity, along with the lessons of this injudicious Christian tutorship, away from him. This new wine should be put into new bottles, which, without being torn, can stretch and accommodate their capacity to the ebullitions of the new liquor that has been deposited therein. In other words, the man should be renovated. The mighty transition from nature to grace should take effect upon him. The great and elementary principles on which there hinges the conversion of the heart, should have told upon his conscience; and he, being ushered by the Christian faith into the joys of the divine countenance and the hopes of eternity, the inordinate love of this world should have already given place to those high and heavenly affections by which it is dispossessed. When the new wine is thus put into a new bottle, both are preserved. The commandment to renounce the amusements of the world ceases to be grievous, or rather the commandment itself ceases to be necessary. The man, in all likelihood, may, after this change, never once be seen at any one indiscriminate intercourse—where fashion, and finery, and pleasure, form into one

blended and brilliant attraction for the assembling together of this world's multitudes. Yet it is not the scowl of monkery that he casts at them. It is not in the grim and ghastly spirit of antiquated puritanism, that he keeps his distance from them. The whole amount of the matter is, that he is otherwise employed. He is taken up with something else that he likes better. He does not ask them to withdraw their presence from the place where their heart is. And they surely should not expect him to lend his presence to a place where his heart is not. Let your theatres be purified of all blasphemy and grossness—let the gossip of your parties be free of the venom of calumny—let your games be unruffled by the fierce and frenzied agitations of desperate adventure—and let your assemblies be chastened out of all but the thoughtless vivacity of light and emancipated spirits, that love, at the impulse of music, to expatiate in fairy circles on an illuminated scene of gracefulness and gaiety: and we are not aware upon what ground he can single out and stigmatise as a monstrous abomination any one of these varieties. And, yet he may look upon them all as so many varieties of earthliness—as the occupations of a moral region distinct from the one through which he is travelling—and the delights of a clime of diverse air and quality, from that in which he can breathe with comfort or satisfaction. It may be true that he has abandoned them, yet not at the bidding of a capricious intolerance, but in the unforced and unfettered exercise of his own liberty. As the new wine is suited to the new bottle, so are the present

habits to the present heart of the new creature in Jesus Christ our Lord. In the act of giving up the fashions or the frivolities of a passing world, he only follows the high behests of the judgment and the taste and the affection that are freely operating within his own regenerated bosom—he only, in this instance, exemplifies one of the many exhibitions that come forth of their own accord, from the feelings and the faculties of his spiritual nature.

The reply that was once given by an aged Christian to the question of an anxious beginner at the work of Christianity, is quite in the zest and spirit of the principle that we now advocate. He saw his young friend to be on a hopeful career of enquiry, and had no doubt of the final result of all his conscientiousness; and perceived that he was moving aright among the great elementary feelings that relate to sin and repentance and faith; and when the question was put by him, whether he should now continue to go to the theatre, the answer was, that he might go as long as he could—an answer, we own, very much to our taste, and appearing to us as if replete with wisdom of a very high order: And, we appeal to yourselves, whether it was not greatly better, that, instead of admitting him to this doubtful disputation, he was left to the wholesome exercise of his spirit on the leading essentials of our faith, and, at length found his own way to that lofty vantage ground, whence he could descry such unfading glories as gave to his heart its full entertainment, and whence he could

turn him from the now tasteless enjoyments of the world, to purer and nobler gratifications.

But still it may be asked, is it not true of all the amusements referred to, and to which so many immortal creatures have devoted themselves, that in them the spirit of earthliness has the undoubted predominancy; and that the places where they are held, leave their company on the broad way, and not on the narrow path, which leadeth to life everlasting? Grant this to be true, and that all these obnoxious assemblages were broken up and dispersed of their visitors—these visitors may still keep on the broad way; and we cannot distinctly see what is gained by drawing thousands away from the theatre and ball-room, if in the movement that we have impressed upon them, they shall all tarry at any point that is short of the conversion of their souls. There is a line of demarcation between the two great regions of the carnal and the spiritual; and though to the former you assign all the houses of public entertainment that ever have been reared, and so fulminate against them till they are levelled to the dust, yet we see not the profit that accrues to Christianity, if all the worshippers of these conceived abominations still keep that side of the line of demarcation which they wont to occupy. In these circumstances, we would not like to address a worldly assemblage on the vanity of public places and public entertainments. We should take a loftier aim. We should feel as if nothing had been effected by pulling any one of these conclusively away from the theatre, if we had not pulled them across the mighty line of

separation, that marks off the region of grace from the region of sinful and unconverted nature. To the achievement of this great transition then, would we give our first earnestness and our first energies; and, meanwhile, holding the subordinate question in abeyance, would we try to find a way to their conscience with the appalling thoughts of a yet unchristianized soul, of a yet unprovided eternity.

Some of you may have read, in the life of the celebrated Whitfield, of the well-known attempt that he made at one of the great London fairs, when, amid all the fantastic and grotesque erections of such an occasion, he contrived to introduce a pulpit; and, braving the whole uproar of riot and ridicule excited by his appearance, actually preached for days together to the assembled multitude. We know not, particularly, what was the subject of his addresses. But sure we are, that there was a something in them of far more comprehensive import, than that of denouncing with intemperate and untimely zeal as a gross abomination, the scenes of madness and merriment and festivity wherewith he was surrounded. He went there charged with the gospel of Jesus Christ; and his errand was not to put down one of the modifications of worldliness, but all worldliness. And if, on the strength of the great and essential truths of Christianity, he gained but twenty converts from darkness to light, he did a higher achievement, than if, without Christianizing one, he had dispersed the assemblage of twenty thousand—frightened by his menaces, but not led by the power of his ministrations to that following of the Lord fully on earth, which terminates in His

approval of them at the judgment-seat, and their welcome to His everlasting habitations. He did, it is said, as the reward of his noble intrepidity, secure a goodly number of converts on that occasion. He did not break up the fair, for it is still upholden; but he did a great deal better, he gathered out of it a harvest for eternity. He did more by the conquest he made over a few hearts, than if he had only put to flight the persons of all this mighty multitude. The sons and daughters whom he turned unto righteousness, he withdrew from their former amusements, not by a movement of superstitious fear, but by a high movement of affection and principle—their favourite haunting-place having now become the house of prayer—their best-loved resort the companionship of the saints, the conventicles of praise and piety.

It would need more than the nerve and the intrepidity of a Whitfield, to force a sermon into any of those places of public amusement which we have had occasion to specify in the course of our present argument. The thing is impossible, and could not be tolerated. But the fact is undoubted, both of the sons and daughters of this world's gaiety, that, among the other sportive caprices which fashion has been known to indulge in, she sometimes sends her votaries to church; and varies by a sermon on the Sabbath, the giddy round of her week-day entertainments. And should any of her enamoured followers be now listening, we would have them to know, that it is not at present with any one of those entertainments that we are now holding controversy. But we are charged with a controversy of import

far more tremendous. Our impeachment of them is, because of their ungodliness. Our direct affirmation, and let them carry it to their consciences and try it there, is, that they live without God in the world; that, to the purpose of any practical influence on their hearts and on their habits, He is not in all their thoughts; and that in the whirl of time's gratifications and of time's concerns, they have buried all effective consideration of eternity. We say that the element in which they live and move and have their being, is an element of earthliness—which, seeing that it is really in God that they live and move and have their being, is tantamount to the element of a wilful and rebellious atheism. We would warn them, that, through that pleasing atmosphere of deceit by which they are encompassed, the eye of Him who sitteth on the throne of Heaven, now looketh with an eye of clear and penetrating intelligence; and beholds in them so many imperishable creatures, who forgetful of their high destination, are pursuing the follies and the frivolities of a short-lived day to the ruin of their souls. And, it is not upon this one folly, or upon that other frivolity, that we would enter our protest against them; but, pointing direct to the citadel of their hearts, garrisoned to very fulness with no other than earthly desires, we would call their parties of pleasure and of public amusement, not so much the acts as the insignia of their rebellion—as indications of the state of an inner man that had deeply revolted against God. It is to heal this mighty breach that the gospel is declared to them—not to achieve a few circumstantial

reformations in their history, but wholly to regenerate their hearts; and from the habit of those who mind earthly things, so to make all old things pass away, and all things to become new, as that their conversation shall be in Heaven, and their treasure there. Be first Christians, and then we may satisfy your curiosity about the lawfulness or the unlawfulness of theatres. Give up the love of the world for the love of God, and then may we say in how far this world might be used without abusing it. Let the balance be fairly struck between time and eternity; and after this mighty calculation is over, then may we have heart and leisure for pettier calculations, and say what of time may be given to recreation, and what of it to those solemn exercises which have a direct bearing on eternity. Consider your ways. Try your hearts by the standard of God's spiritual law. Look to Christ as the Mediator, who, by His sacrifice and righteousness can alone settle all your deficiencies. Turn from folly and iniquity unto Him, and He will usher you unto the ways of pleasantness and the paths of peace.

But it is now time to have done with this long excursion, among the details and the difficulties of a casuistry, by which the Christian mind has oft been exercised. For, let it never be forgotten, that a heart with rightly-set affections and desires is after all the best of casuists. If the heart in its various regards be as it ought, this is our securest guarantee that the history in its various manifestations will be as it ought. The man who is stationed at the

fountain, and whose business is to keep it in living play, may abandon it for a time to clear and trace out through their proper windings the channels by which the water ought to run. But it is possible that while he tarries at this employment, the fountain may run dry—and of what avail are all his conduits, and all his lines of accurate and well-drawn conveyance, if there be nothing to flow through them? It is quite obvious that his main and important office is to feed and stimulate the fountain —that there his presence is most frequently, and most urgently required—that it is the post from which he ought never to prolong his absence beyond the rigid necessities of the case—and that if for the perfection of the whole apparatus, it be at any time expedient that he should move away to its subordinate parts, or even its more distant extremities, it is indispensable to the whole use and purpose of the apparatus, that he ever and anon reiterate on the well-spring, where the whole being and activity of the operation are upholden. And how much more true is this, if in fact the impetus of the waters shall force a right descent and direction for themselves; if, by the might of their own currency, they can wear a deep channel, and clear away all the obstacles to their progress; if without artificial guidance, they can spontaneously, and by the pure weight of their own native momentum, find their own way to their best and their fittest destination.

Now we must not forget, while lingering among the turns and the windings of Christian casuistry, that there is a place whence the impulse may pro-

ceed of strength enough to overbear its difficulties, and to force a way through all its dark and ambiguous passages—that the new-born desire of a Christianized heart is worth the catalogue of a thousand solutions to a thousand perplexities—that the best way of restoring to light and to liberty the conscience of man, is to enthrone love in his bosom—and that in willing discipleship to this gentlest, yet most persuasive of masters, will every new creature find the best and readiest outlet from all the bewilderments that meet him in his progress, through this great labyrinth of our earthly pilgrimage. Give us but once a taste for sacredness—and we need scarcely speak on the details of sabbath observation to him who already loves that hallowed day, to whom all its exercises are sweet, and all its opportunities are precious. Give us a heart set on the things that are above; and what call for warning against the amusements of the world, the man who in the midst of higher and better engagements, feels their utter insipidity? Or give us an affection for God in Heaven, or for the likeness of God in those who are under a process of renovation to His image upon earth—and we are already anticipated in all our dissuasions against a preference for this world's companionship, or an indiscriminate converse with its festive and fashionable societies. America, said Lord Chatham, must be conquered in Germany. The way to subordinate the human history, is to obtain possession of the human heart—and better than this continued skirmishing among the details and outposts of casuistry, would it be to ply with the right engine, that central and commanding for-

tress, which looks down with imperial sway over the whole territory of this extended warfare.

So that after all we may have lingered for too many sabbaths on those details of pious or prudential observation, over which the single principle of love in the heart might have given the entire mastery. Only let this fountain be replenished with sacred affection, and there is no fear it may well be thought, of the uniform sacredness that will emanate therefrom on all the diversities of human conduct and experience. To this object, then, ought the main force of every Christian teacher be directed—and could he only enlist the will of his hearers on the side of God, then may we be sure, that though he should trace in description all the varieties of their outward way, it will mainly and substantially be a way of godliness.

And we trust that this observation will serve as another argument, for the mighty importance of our much and urgently insisting on the fundamental articles of Christianity. The great achievement is to possess your hearts with the love of the gospel, and this can only be done by possessing your understanding with the truths of the gospel. We know not how to win your regards to God, but by representing Him as God in Christ reconciling the world. We know not how He can become the object of your tenderness, but by His ceasing to become the object of your terror. We know not how your fond affection to Him can be made to arise, but by your fearful apprehensions of Him being made to subside. In other words, the patent way of finding access for love into your

bosoms, is to find access for faith—and could we only obtain credit for the message of peace with God, through the blood of a satisfying atonement, then, by the moving forces of gratitude and good will should we reach a far more effective mastery over all the details of the Christian life, than all the skill of cunning men, all the wisdom of learned moral artificers could possibly obtain for us.

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